

**Subjective response to Place through convergent
strategies in Digital Imaging and Print processes**

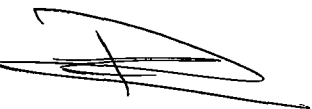
by Troy Ruffels

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

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Where in this volume of space are you situated? The space behind you is as important as what you see before you. What lies beneath you is as relevant as what stands on the far horizon. Actively use your ears to imagine the acoustical hemisphere you occupy. How does the birdsong ramify the belief that you can smell water and stone, use your hands to get the heft and texture of a place - the tensile strength in a willow branch, the moisture in a pinch of soil, the different nap of leaves. Open a vertical line to the place by joining the color and form of the sky to what you see out across the ground. Look away from what you want to scrutinize in order to gain a sense of its scale and proportion...Cultivate a sense of complexity, the sense that another landscape exists beyond the one you can subject to analysis. - Barry Lopez

'A literature of Place', Portland: *The University of Portland Magazine*, Summer 22-25 (25)

ABSTRACT

Subjective response to Place through convergent strategies in Digital Imaging and Print processes.

The project develops visual forms for expressing poetic response to a familiar urban environment. The method evolved uses the convergent potential of digital imaging processes, enabling the development of composite 'metaphoric' imagery, to convey a sense of place.

The exposure to habitat provides fleeting and highly subjective insights. Lens-captured imagery associated with photography and video provides a means to register these incidental truths without breaking the union between mind and place. An additional attraction in using a photographic means of recording source material is the fidelity it brings to the process.

Digital imaging technology has now been in use by artists for a sufficient period for the novelty to subside and to permit a mature appraisal of its potential. The considerable flexibility afforded facilitates the accommodation of a diverse range of content and media. The capacity for convergence opens the door to the possibility of bringing together the emotive and expressive warmth of painting and the documentary coolness of photography. The advantage of encompassing 'warm' and 'cool' approaches is the space it allows for both the subject and the subjective to interact.

As these ideas evolved during the studio investigation, it became apparent that it was the immediacy afforded by the free application of oil paint, which permits the artist to give spontaneous expression to their subjective vision. Although there were to be time lags between the various steps in the methodology for this project, spontaneity within each step was given a high priority.

These aims have been pursued through digital imaging processes with photography and painting, culminating in digital prints. Methodologies,

exploring the convergent potential of digital technology for representing subjective response to intimacies uncovered in nature, were developed using both still and video cameras, commercial image manipulation software, a range of media and three generations of digital printers.

Hobart and its environment was the chosen site for engagement because this incorporates urban, parkland, hill country and waterfrontage. Also, it was familiar territory and conveniently accessible. The methodology requires many repeat visits to selected sites. The main parameters for the project include the above environment and the still, two-dimensional image. The context, working processes and image developments are discussed in the body of the exegesis.

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SECTION 1

CENTRAL ARGUMENT

General Objectives

1. This project investigates alternative visual strategies for representing a sense of place. The general problem posed, visually expressing environmental experience through painting and digital imaging, is that of finding a suitable form to convey this knowledge: to give effective visual form to an embodied experience.
2. Knowledge is accumulated through experience, and experience mediated by ways of seeing that have been cultivated or learnt. Such knowledge does not always manifest itself in a tangible form, and is not easily transformed into a communicable mode. For example a photograph conveys only a fraction of the information we are exposed to at any given moment; as a document it represents only a part of the mind/body experience. Painting, through gestural acts, raises the emotional response but it can lose the validation of actuality.
3. This investigation explores the computer's ability to bring together the expressive qualities of oil paint 'warm' and the documentary capacity of photography 'cool' as a possible solution to this problem. In making art about the experience of place, a diverse range of imaging technologies was employed. These ranged from input devices, software programs used for their manipulation and printers for the image's output.
4. The challenge has been to facilitate a satisfying correspondence between experience of the urban environment and the materials and processes used to transform the experience into artworks.
5. The investigation had a number of specific aesthetic outcomes that made the lens-captured image less defined, increasing the scope for subjective expression. The make-up of the image was extended beyond adjusting focus to blur or sharpen. It employed layering procedures common to painting and print-

making; and colour, tonality, and tactile supports like canvas to shift the appearance of the image from the photographic source. The digital medium is about constructing spaces; its expressive potential is not primarily photographic in nature.

6. The outcomes of the research project, and the visual language that has emerged, are found in the experimental body of digital prints presented. There is an interaction of memory, imagination, expressive drive and manipulation, which tested the possibilities of the imaging technologies employed.

Introduction

The motivation to make artwork serves an inner need to communicate a personal subjectivity to others, while increasing my comprehension of the world. This project aims to create a form of visual poetry that reflects personal experience in a localised urban environment; and, to find a suitable way to express the little truths found in simple encounters with a tangible and familiar reality. It investigates ways of communicating these insights by addressing correspondences between an engagement with the urban environment, and the visual language used to translate this experience into imagery. The underlying theme remains a reflection on the transient and ephemeral nature of contemporary environmental experience.

The project uses the convergent potential of digital imaging processes to explore associations between experience, and the methods used to convey the discoveries and insights relating to place. It attempted to create a hybrid image that was evocative of personal experience; reflecting the forces that shape responses, and, considering the way certain appearances are accepted as being more valid than others. Methodologies that increased the correspondence between experience and expression were evolved through the studio practice.

In the context of the project painting is considered as a philosophical exercise. As Howard Halle¹ suggests, it is a way of thinking through, and constructing images, that is underpinned by its inherent expressive and emotive qualities. This approach to painting has been critical to the conceptual development of a realisation of an urban visual poetry.

Hobart and its environments were chosen as the site for engagement because they incorporate urban, parkland, hill country and waterfrontage. The movement of weather, quality of light and atmospheric characteristics transform these environments into ambient and contemplative spaces, enabling reflection on the nature of interaction and response to the sense of being a part of the environment. The subject matter evolved from day-to-day experience of place and through movement along familiar pathways amidst the tangible urban environment.

The main parameters for the project include this environment and the still, two-dimensional image. The project explores cyclical processes (exposure, response, and expression) that encompass visual experience. In seeking to express responses to place it has been paramount to consider the transition between stages. The processes that were employed validate the experience and allow the possibility of representing the nature of involvement with a locale. Composite metaphoric representation is a means of accomplishing this - dependent on subjective insight - encompassing qualities of the subject and of an emotive relationship to the environment; a circumstance where incongruities and harmonies multiply.

The thesis is a contribution to the understanding of things that do not always appear in a tangible form, and are not easily translated into visual media. It investigates the capability of the computer to bring these different approaches of image-making closer together; working between both painting and photography it aims to increase the emotive qualities of the printed image while maintaining the validation of the particular. The underlying intention has

¹Douglas Fogle, referring to an essay by Howard Halle, on Andreas Gursky. Fogle, Douglas 'The trouble with Painting' *Painting at the edge of the world*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2001, page 18

been to create a poetic visual language that speaks of places; and that conveys something of this experience of place to others.

Background

During my undergraduate studies painting and print-making were explored for their expressive capacity; video was only engaged with towards the end of the course. Experience of the first two involved an active engagement with the tactile, through the medium of paint, and drawing onto the surface of an etching plate. These procedures were slow and meditative. The experience that generated the image was strongly linked to the act of making and a fascination with the process of transcribing the world *into* images. Both painting and print-making involved building up layers of information, one upon the next, each necessarily responsive to the preceding stage. The importance of these processes was that the involvement was one of construction. Images and spaces were built.

The shift from working with painting and print-making towards exploring and experimenting with digital technologies was not dramatic. It did not involve giving up or abandoning one medium in favour of another. It was still based on the construction of visual spaces; there was curiosity as to whether there was a relationship between these forms of image-making and, if so, what potential this held. This interest focused on the computer's capacity to bring divergent forms of image-making closer together. In particular there was the desire to create prints that had a more 'painterly' feel, that suggested a textured and fibrous surface, qualities that related more to oil paint on canvas.

Much of the digital two-dimensional (2D) art seen at the time (mid 1990's) had an obvious photographic quality, a seamless construction of manipulated flat photographic images, or a pixelated structure that spoke loudly about the nature of the process that had created it. This heightened a personal interest in moving beyond this approach, to achieve a painterly mode of expression using the medium.

The Honours project set out to explore ways in which to reflect the nature of a

painted image, by combining images from different forms of lens-capture, such as video, photography, super-8. These were scanned and then dissected through the computer using Adobe Photoshop.² Aspects of images were selected and re-layered in a form suitable for being printed out, echoing the layering of painting and print-making strategies and printing multiple layers, one over another - a build up of surface by layering semi-transparent glazes. Glazing produces a depth to the surface.



Fig.1

Troy Ruffels

Remembering the Sun, 1996

This brief introduction to work from my Honours year, highlights significant concerns and achievements. These were the foundations for a more in-depth exploration of the potential for the media to generate a language of expression using photo-based digitised imagery. This earlier work formed the foundation for my thesis project with the separate concerns of painting and photography retaining their importance.

²Photoshop is a computer program, which enables the digital alteration and construction of imagery. Adobe Photoshop, copyright Adobe Systems Incorporated, here-after referred to as Photoshop.

SECTION 2

EXPLORING THE ESSENCE OF PLACE

Introduction

Perceptions of the landscape are progressively transformed in response to an increasingly prevalent technological interface. While digital technology increases our capacity to render the world, it can lend itself to a feeling of estrangement - with the essence of things becoming more elusive. Portraying a sense of place and investing it with meaning provides a number of challenges in this project. Firstly, there is the need for a methodology through which to arrive at a meaningful engagement with the environment. Secondly, there is the search for pivotal images and suitable metaphors in and of the landscape. Finally, there is the need to evolve a visual language capable of transforming these motifs into an artwork that holds onto their emotive core, extending their metaphoric potential from the particular to the universal. *Exploring the essence of place* examines in general terms, the range of methodologies employed in this project, highlighting the need to value the present moment, and addressing the cyclical process of exposure, response, and expression. It looks at the role technology plays in shaping a visual code through which we construct and interpret space and place, and provides a general insight into the methodologies developed by this investigation. (This is elaborated upon in Sections 4 and 5 that deal more directly with studio practice.)

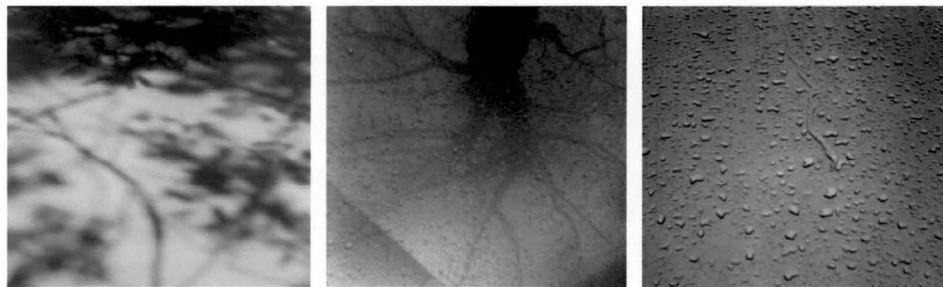


Fig.2

Troy Ruffels

from *Hood* series 2000

Valuing the present moment

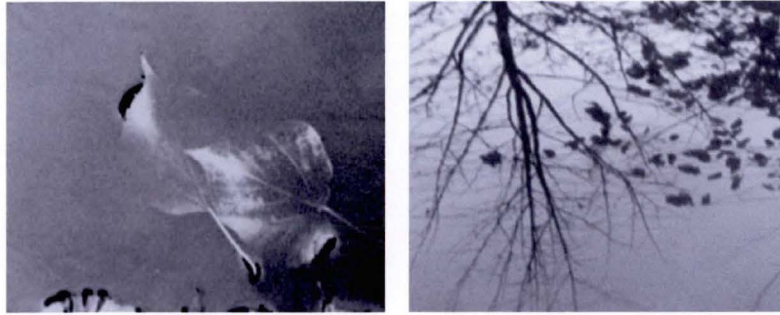


Fig.3 and 4

Troy Ruffels, journal images 2002

This investigation considers the known environment as a deeply moving source of inspiration through which to reflect on contemporary concerns.³ It explores ways of compensating for our hi-tech detachment from the environment; for slowing down time, allowing us to contemplate the ephemeral, and dwell in the transitory, reviving empathy towards the urban landscape.

The society in which we live exaggerates the value of the new, while the role played by technology as an interface that mediates experience, dislocates us from nature. Paul Virilio echoes this when interviewed by Jerome Sands *for Flash Art*:

*...the surface of the world is now totally known to us, but the images that serve us by allowing us to look at the world, have become just as unknown as the unveiled world itself.*⁴

One of the results of the speed at which we digest images is a tendency to ignore those things most familiar to us. Change is perceived as being informative and exciting, whereas the familiar can often be considered commonplace and irrelevant. This is the result of the extraordinary array and diversity of images offered to us - a tyranny of diversity. We ignore the potential of the local in contributing to our understanding of the world. With

³Octavio Paz, in his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech (1990) emphasises the need for us to value *our own reality*, our local environment. He suggests that we should look to our environment and culture for the answers to universal questions instead of turning to the displacement offered by a global identity and by the media, which distorts our sense of reality. Paz, Octavio, *In Search of the Present: 1990 Nobel Lecture*.

⁴Virilio, Paul, *Interview with Paul Virilio* by Jerome Sands, *Flash Art* 138, 1998

new experiences, we can only scratch the surface, but our familiar world allows us *to explore from inside*.

To see the true nature of things we have to be aware of the present moment; in a state of consciousness that allows us to flow with the process and to observe and merge with our surroundings. This way we can be neither too closely attached, nor too detached, and can begin to recognize the habits and emotions which affect us.

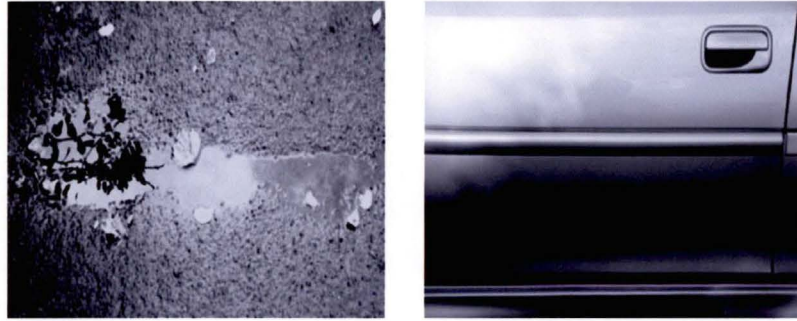


Fig.5 and 6

Troy Ruffels, journal images 2002

Looking about, we are confronted with a world of shifting appearances, which come into being before our eyes, and then dissolve. When we catch a glimpse from a certain angle spindly winter branches appear to streak across pools of water, or car bonnets - existing for a moment. Our position, point of view, the quality of light, and other atmospheric characteristics coincide to reveal a parallel way through which to view things; a transient and ephemeral window but, like Monet's approach to painting, it may bring us new insights.

Exposure, Response and Expression

Our knowledge of place and space depends on a number of things but particularly on our exposure to, observations of, and responses to, various phenomena; and, for most of us, the overriding path is visual. Sight is the faculty that is essential to our work, and *insight*⁵ is the aspect of that faculty which allows us to intuitively concentrate on the 'essence,' or 'intrinsic

⁵*insight* - penetrating mental vision or discernment; the faculty of seeing into inner characters or underlying truth. *Concise Macquarie Dictionary* 1998

nature,' of things observed.

Knowledge is a rich tapestry of exposure and comprehension. Insights gained from exposure to habitat in relation to this project can be considered in a number of ways:

- an understanding of the specific atmospheric characteristics and patterns of place
- the impact of light and other natural forces on matter, e.g. wind and rain on the harbour waters
- interpreting space, light and time, which are central in achieving ambience, measuring depth and understanding spatial characteristics
- observing the effects which these things have in altering the experience of events that capture attention - the multifarious relations between, for example, light, time and weather.

Light is at the centre of visual observation and interpretation; dependent on time of day, space, and atmospheric conditions, and central in controlling what and how individual visual perception is shaped. It is the transforming capacity of light which helps us to gauge relationships in the environment and which subtly alters perceptions of things and the ways they may trigger responses, conveying quiet unspoken truths about mundane events.

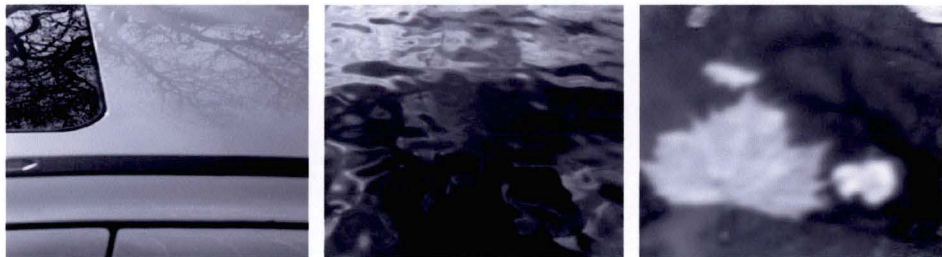


Fig.6,7 and 8

Troy Ruffels, journal images 2002

Writers like Annie Dillard and Barry Lopez provide a context for the visual methodology developed by this project and are referred to throughout this exegesis.

*I walk out; I see something, some event that would otherwise have been utterly missed and lost; or something sees me, some enormous power brushes me with its clean wing, and I resound like a beaten bell... I am an explorer, then and I am also a stalker, or the instrument of the hunt itself.*⁶ (Annie Dillard)

Dillard's approach to her subject is an inherently poetic vision of things. It alludes to the role of the observer as an active emotional participant - marked by experience. It reflects the search for visual metaphors that correspond to the process of engagement with the environment. Dillard's attitude reaffirms the importance of subjectivity in this hunt. The experience of place becomes central to the investigation and, in effect, the visual parlance describing this emerges from subjectivity.

The appearance of the world takes shape through our interpretation of a familiar visual code, and this code is culturally ingrained through exposure to, and an understanding of, certain visual structures. Language, all signs and images, are *mediations* of reality, not transparent windows onto an external actuality.

In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Dillard refers to a book by Marcus Von Senden called *Space and Sight*. His research prompted Dillard's reference to an entire group of people, those born blind, who do not live in a world that contains space, size, distance, or many other qualities we accept as given. Several decades ago, when eye surgeons first learned to remove cataracts safely, they could restore sight overnight to people who had been blind from birth. Suddenly released into the light, the newly sighted did not feel freed. They were plunged into a mystery that was at times overwhelming.⁷

'For the newly sighted', Dillard comments, '*vision is pure sensation unencumbered by meaning.*'⁸ Adding the meaning proved too much for some of

⁶Dillard, Annie, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, page 12

⁵'The vast majority of patients, of both sexes and all ages, had in Von Senden's opinion no idea of space whatsoever', Dillard writes, drawing from the notes left by surgeons. 'Form, distance, and size were so many meaningless syllables. A patient, 'had no idea of depth, confusing it with roundness.' Dillard quoting Senden - Dillard, Annie, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, page 25

⁸Dillard, Annie, page 26

them. They reverted to closing their eyes when they were alone, feeling objects with their hands and tongues, or climbing the stairs with eyes shut to avoid the dizzying prospect of going straight up a wall. *'One doctor comments on the rapid and complete loss of that striking and wonderful serenity which is characteristic only of those who have never seen.'*⁹ Because we are so used to our usual construct of the world that does not mean there is no other.

On the other hand, many newly sighted people speak well of the world, and teach us how dull is our own vision. To one patient a human hand, unrecognised, is something 'bright and then holes'...A little girl visits a garden 'she is greatly astonished, and can scarcely be persuaded to answer, stands speechless in front of the tree, which she only names on taking hold of it, and then as the tree with the lights in it'.¹⁰

These examples bring to attention our often complacent attitude towards the visual world. Only through attentiveness can we regain some of the wonder that comes with *seeing* the world for the first time, or *seeing* with fresh eyes.



Fig.9,10 and 11

Troy Ruffels, journal images 2002

The method of observation and engagement with place is a recurring theme in Barry Lopez's work. *'Seek to know place with all the senses and beware too great emphasis on the partial knowledge provided by interrogative processes.'* He warns us *'put aside the bird book, the analytic frame of mind, any compulsion to identify...'* He asks us to *'sit still...for the purpose of such attentiveness is to gain intimacy, to rid yourself of assumption.'*¹¹ What is suggested is that in seeking to know a place one must approach it with openness, but also, allow the senses to absorb it rather than set about rationalising and analysing. It is important to allow the place to filter through

⁹ibid page 28

¹⁰ibid page 28

¹¹Hay, Peter, quoting Barry Lopez, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*, page 153

one's being and to become vulnerable to it. *If you open yourself up you can build intimacy. Out of such intimacy may come a sense of belonging. And intimacy is multi-dimensional, multi-sensory.*¹² Lopez is talking about one of the fundamental criteria for a meaningful engagement with the environment; it requires pre-knowledge, but this must be linked to a kind of innocence which allows us to see things as though for the first time.¹³



Fig.12

Claude Monet

Waterlilies (The Clouds), 1903

Claude Monet wanted to paint each of his subjects without knowing what it was. He hoped evidently that his approach, his assumed ignorance, would 'de-gloss' things, subverting the tendency for the eye, in association with human memory, to rob an experience of its uniqueness. Such an approach allows us to see through fresh eyes; and, if only for a moment, to gain a new insight into the world around us. 'Knowing or naming' can cause us to anticipate the way things might appear. His work is evidence that he wanted to *SEE* the lights in the trees.

Dillard writes about personally observed truths in a flow of words that binds objective and subjective. Her encounters have a scientific accuracy but they

¹²Lopez, Barry, *Crossing Open Ground*, page 154

¹³'The land retains an identity of its own, still deeper and more subtle than we can know. Our obligation toward it becomes simple: to approach with an uncalculating mind, with an attitude of regard. To try to see the range and variety of its expression - its weather conditions and colours and animals. To intend from the beginning to preserve some of the mystery within it as a kind of wisdom to be experienced, not questioned.' Barry Lopez, quoted by Hay, Peter, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*, page 153

are not disinterested. She is involved - mind, senses, emotions. Her writing has urgency, an immediacy that draws readers into her experience as if they were standing beside her. Language, and possibly film, can do this. The encounter with the still image is different. It is contemplative and another approach is required when expressing these concerns in the context of the static image.

The methodology evolved by this investigation, aimed to draw attention to the little truths to be uncovered in places close at hand through reconstructing experiences of place as artworks. This is not a moral crusade, but it is an offer to share with others exciting moments; encouraging the contemplation of the urban environment where we live; and showing the relevance it has for our daily life. Most viewers would be familiar with the subjects represented in the work, having glanced briefly at an object, or glimpsed an unfolding event in the corner of their eye. The work contains recognisable details and through re-contextualising these peripheral moments, it aims to offer another world for consideration.

In the course of the project, processes and methodologies previously used, which led to the pursuit of this investigation, were reconsidered; and insights into the mechanisms of exposure and expression, gained during the investigation, were incorporated.

The search for suitable images

Portraying the essence of place and investing it with subjective impressions provides the artist with challenges on two fronts. Firstly, there is the search for the pivotal image, or set of images, which most closely communicates the essence of that place. Secondly, there is the choice of manipulative options capable of overlaying the selection with ethereal qualities akin to gut response. While the first is a documentation, the second is an immaterial, spiritual or internal association and, therefore, without a fixed visual form.

Visual metaphors were used to give form to these inner feelings. While the work retained a certain 'photographic look', the image was transformed from the specific qualities of lens-capture in the final outcome.

In themselves metaphoric images about personal responses are bound to be ambiguous; and the project embraces the notion that the artworks are open to various readings. The space provided by ambiguity allows the viewer to exercise imagination and individual interpretation and invites a deeper level of engagement.

The process was one of discovering and developing suitable visual motifs. Images were selected from the vast repertoire of things seen. Work often grew out of simple and acute observations, seen or experienced repeatedly in the familiar urban environment, in whole or in part, which were of interest by virtue of their physical nature and by their ability to engage new levels of thought and feeling. Some processes, experiences, and observations became motifs in the work as a result of their sense of intrigue - and they were subsequently elaborated upon and developed in the visual artwork - a particular quality of light, or air, a shape, a texture, or a set of relationships. The work grew out of this physical nucleus of experience, from which the dual emotional and intellectual impact of the work developed.



Fig.16 -23
Troy Ruffels, journal images 2002

Over time, certain observations evolved into images through which to explore pivotal themes, while engagement with the environment, exposure, response and expression, found a metaphorical equivalent in the processes used to capture, manipulate and compose imagery. The methodology worked out through this

project, selection from a range of camera or video images taken in the field, provides the first layer; while the second layer comes from the array of applications available through computer software. These are combined to produce the print file for what may be a solitary image, or one component of a group image.

In expressing the world as they see it, artists have used diverse strategies. Though these often involve imaging technologies, an underlying and unifying factor is the role of metaphor: a device often used by visual artists to express the metaphysical, the immaterial and the spiritual. The use of metaphor is also important for confounding the idea of a singular, as opposed to pluralistic, reality. At the most basic level, the same image produced as a photograph, displayed on a video monitor, or re-produced as a painting, will generate substantially different readings.

The problems set by this project centred on how to incorporate in a 2D artwork an immaterial sensation about place, which allowed the contemplation of such an experience. The question of how to achieve a suitable poetic form has been pursued through developing visual strategies for composite imagery using a range of cameras, computer programs, and printing hardware.

A visual language is developed by each individual and will generally be specific to a particular era; we learn to interpret images through familiarity with processes and systems of observation already existing. An example is the shift in perception, which occurred following the development of photography. The world appeared to take a new shape, with the photographic document accepted as objectifying the appearance of reality.

The success of communicating an experience, or evoking an emotion, is dependent on the correlation between intention, processes used, and the visual outcome. Subtle and often-subconscious forces influence the interpretation of metaphors. The reading of an image, for example, is not solely dependant upon the cerebral capacity to analyse, or interpret literally; but responds to its ability to trigger an aspect of memory; to evoke a feeling it stirs inside our very being.

The interaction of visual elements is often subtle; cause and effect difficult to identify.

In relation to this project, the chosen print media has a significant effect on the final outcome, as does the type of 'ripping' software and digital printer. Familiarity with the performance of these became an important consideration in earlier decisions. Visual metaphors are composite in this way. They are constructed from layers of information each capable, on its own, of evoking reaction, e.g. emotional response to a field of colour; and also of relating to human interpretive processes that are unique to each individual.

Perception is a means of interpreting and constructing a concept of the actual world. It is a duality of meaning, at once the experience of the world, while also, the process that mediates that experience - as interpretation is based on subjectivity.¹⁴

Here, consider again Annie Dillard, and her description of a blind child who had her sight restored: the child asked why there were lights in the trees? It is a simple and deeply poetic question that causes us to reassess what we see or, at the very least, the way we understand what we see. It retains a fundamental accuracy of observation, referring to light reflecting from the glimmering surface of leaves or from the morning dew that had settled there overnight. The formerly blind girl saw what we all see, but which we overlook because of our pre-knowledge. This reported incident serves to open up a metaphorical realm of possibilities.

Space, Place & Memory

A sense of place, of belonging to a place and, through intimate contact, coming to understand it, is critical to the project as a whole and to the methodologies employed in the investigation. It is these methodologies for exploring and expressing subjectivity that form an important research aspect of the project and that are discussed in later sections relating to the studio investigation and

¹⁴ *...the real subject of his pictures is always the invisible bubble that our gaze casts upon the world.* Rugoff, Ralph, *World Perfect*, Freize, 43, page 52

the development of work. Places are defined by patterns, rhythms, daily and seasonal cycles. Landscape and architecture may be part of place, but the essence of place evolves through experience. Gretel Elrich highlights the importance of experience in this process when she says:

I like to think of landscape not as a fixed place, but as a path that is unwinding before my eyes, under my feet. To see and know a place is a contemplative act. It means emptying our minds and letting what is there, in all its multiplicity and endless variety come in¹⁵.

One of the constants of landscape art is that it offers a space to reflect on our humanity, on our vulnerability and mortality. Nature is an omnipresent force that shapes our lives. It is the source of beauty and inspiration, but simultaneously it may be seen as cruel, harsh and unforgiving. Artists, poets and writers have, throughout history, continued to reflect on this duality and on our ambivalent responses to its changing nature. Most accept that landscape is a construct of the human imagination; or, as Schama puts it, *'Before it can ever be a response for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind.'*¹⁶



Fig. 24
Caspar David Friedrich
Monk by the Sea, 1809-10

As a genre in literature and art, landscape explores the intersection between nature and culture; it is constantly evolving, responding to technological and scientific developments and to gradually changing cultural definitions that shape our ideas. The values we give to the environment reflect how we see the world, and, our place in it.

¹⁵Ehrlich, Gretel, 'Landscape', introduction to *Legacy of Light* (1987)

Today, many artists regard landscape as separate from the actual vista or view we have of a particular landmass.¹⁷ Many approach it from a spiritual perspective, relate it back to the body, or to concerns they have about different kinds of activities and conditions in an environment, e.g. speed, congestion, alienation and anxiety, commonly associated with metropolitan habitats. While for some, nature refers to a 'wilderness' environment; for others it is equally firmly fixed in the natural forces operating in densely populated urban areas.

Such approaches result from individual interpretations within a broader sphere of cultural reference. Decisions are made based on subjectivity; these in turn, shape the nature of our interaction with our surroundings; the paths we follow, and those we choose not to follow. A sense of the landscape is evolved - constructed from both individual sensibilities, and a cultural code that governs its interpretation.

The act of remembering while experiencing, influences engagement with place. There are also aesthetic perceptions we bring to any landscape.¹⁸

These grow out of our value for a benign or ideal nature and, of course, nature in its inexorability is only briefly benign. A momentary disconnection or a major disaster will change our response.

My work aims to suggest the endless cycle of transformation at play in the urban landscape. It is about the presence of memory, memory that occurs parallel to an experience of the present. It is an ephemeral world, transient and mysterious. Its subjects are not remote, but those which we have all

¹⁶Schama, Simon, *Landscape and Memory*, Pages 6-7

¹⁷*'I do not distinguish between the inner and outer landscapes, between the environment as the physical world and the mental image of that world. It is the tension, transition, the exchange, and the resonance between these two modalities that energise and define our reality. The key element in this exchange of energies is the image, and this space in between'* - Viola, Bill, *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House* page

¹⁸Gerhard Richter brings one such perception to our attention when he says: 'Nature knows no meaning, no sympathy and is absolutely mindless and inhumane. Its stupidity is absolute. The beauty in landscape, its enchanting colour and magnificence, is our own perception, which if switched off reveals appalling horror and ugliness.' Brown, Glenn. Gerhard Richter, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, Frieze, 44, Jan-Feb, 1999, page 74

experienced, in moments that may be as brief as a glance or a glimpse in passing.¹⁹

Celia Lendis suggests that *such a moment is apparent*, in the work of artists selected for the exhibition, *Parallel*. The understanding or knowledge offered is not concrete, but a sensation of remembering.

*...as they excavate fragments of the shapeless, formless world existing beneath our usual line of vision, they simultaneously infuse the moment with poetry, with a poignant and very human vulnerability. They offer, perhaps, not a deeper understanding of our territory, our country, but a sensation of remembering. And they provide a space in which we can begin to reconstruct a world at once estranged from us and within us, a world of memory that exists not in the distant past, but parallel our everyday experience.*²⁰

Our sense of space is closely linked to the environment in which we live.

Elizabeth Grosz points out that *'bodies are always understood within a spatial and temporal context'*²¹ which governs and guides our individual perceptions of the world. And elsewhere (Pp 104-110) she looks particularly at the relation between bodies and the city; a relationship, which is, usually, more complex than we acknowledge. Amongst other things she suggests that *'the city helps to...orient sensory and perceptual information (and)...helps produce specific conceptions of spatiality.'*^{22 23}

Knowledge of space and place has focused on an exploration of the urban environment of Hobart in particular, and Tasmania in general. The lie of the land, and the atmospheric characteristics intrinsic to this particular habitat have influenced knowledge of place and the interpretation of landscape.

¹⁹*'Just glance at an object as you pass it by. This is the physical realm - we avoid bumping into things in this mode, without really thinking about them. But then grab the object with your eye and stare at it for a long time. It gradually takes over your thoughts. This is why duration is an important element of my work - cultivating the ability to see "through objects".'* - Viola, Bill, *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House*, page 151

²⁰Lendis, Celia, *Parallel*, Unpublished paper 2002 (Location III, Troy Ruffels among selected artist)

²¹Grosz, Elizabeth, *Space, Time and Perversion: the politics of bodies*, Page 88

²²*ibid*, page 109

²³Relevant here is a comment from Harrison and Wood in their introduction to *The Idea of the Modern World*: *'It remains a central paradox of the new art that it sought its authenticity in a vast Nature, but that this repeated incantation to Nature was made under urban circumstances.'* - *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* Oxford, Blackwell, 1992

Hobart is a city in south-eastern Tasmania geographically located at the base of Mt. Wellington; it stretches down and embraces the harbour waterfront and estuary of the Derwent River. Unlike most cities that dominate and overwhelm the natural surroundings, Hobart is dominated by nature. In contrast to other Australian urban settings, *'the topography is such that many people live higher than the tallest buildings in the city. This provides a relationship between settlement and the broader landscape in contrast to other Australian urban settings.'*²⁴ It allows people to have an immediate appreciation of the structure of the city in relation to its surrounding terrain. The natural setting remains dominant despite the constructed spaces. Areas, yet to be developed, are more visually extensive than developed space enabling a heightened appreciation and experience of the natural environment: an essential force that permeates and informs the urban milieu. There are many vantage-points within the city where one can see the mountain or the estuary of the Derwent River. The buildings punctuate, but do not overwhelm, the greenery of the forests and grasslands, that remain visible within and around the city edges. The sense of movement in the urban spaces and the relationship to the natural world are important elements in my work.



Fig.25, 26

Views of Hobart: Tasman Bridge, Constitution Dock

It is a relatively unique experience to be able to see where a city begins and ends; yet this is Hobart. From the top of Campbell Street in the central business district one can see to the water and beyond to the peninsula and distant hills. There is a sense of wonder at what lies beyond, the last stop before Antarctica; the cold winter winds that occasionally and dramatically sweep in over the city from the south make this a reality. This place is the focus of the work, with

²⁴Wooley, Leigh, *Naturally Urban, making public place on the edge of wilderness*, Siglo Journal for

distinctive areas of interest that have been concentrated on during the project.

Approaches in imaging the landscape

There is a symbiotic relationship between our thinking and our experience of a geographic place; our perception of it in the traditional landscape sense and as the 'pannage' unfolding as we scan the city and its surroundings.

In *Crossing Open Ground*, Barry Lopez differentiates between two forms of landscape that have particular relevance to contemporary engagement with it.

*I can think of two landscapes - one outside the self, the other within. The external landscape is the one we see - not only the line and colour of the land and its shading at different times of day, but also its plants and animals in season, its weather, its geology, the record of climate and evolution.*²⁵

The interior landscape is a kind of projection in an individual's mind of a part of the exterior one. Lopez argues that these relationships are arranged, according to the moral, intellectual and spiritual development of the individual.^{26 27}

Landscape is made comprehensible through the relationships that evolve as we gain knowledge or insight about an environment; we do not learn by knowing the name or identity of everything in it, but by an intimate perception of the relationships that occur²⁸ - 'like that between the sparrow and the twig.'²⁹

A sense of nature pervades most man-made environments. In city and urban environments, built to human scale, the sheer forces of nature are

the arts: 11, Autumn/Winter 1999, page 46

²⁵Lopez, Barry, *Crossing Open Ground*, page 64

²⁶Lopez, Barry *Crossing Open Ground*, pages 64-65

²⁷Bill Viola notes that 'Landscape exists as a reflection on the inner walls of the mind, or as a projection of the innerstate without. Flat open vast space lends itself to a clearer monitoring of the inner world. Contemporary urban spaces talk to you, incessantly - signs call out, try to grab you, programmed general consensus signals determine where and when you walk, the intersecting spheres of psychic perceptive space of others in too close proximity creates confusion and imbalance. The "stillness" of a sleeping apartment building of 150 families is not stillness at all. Removing all cues from the outside world, the voices of the inner state become louder, clearer.' Viola, Bill, *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House*, page 53

²⁸The shape and character of these relationships as a person's thinking, I believe, are deeply influenced by where on this earth one goes, what one touches, the patterns one observes in nature - the intricate history of one's life in the land, even a life in the city, where wind, the chirp of birds, the line of a falling leaf are known.- Lopez, Barry. *A literature of Place*

exaggerated, as the environment is more condensed. Atmospheric change and spatial ambience are more evident in metropolitan habitats - and this gives rise to a sense of the sublime. Over the course of this project, the falling scatter of autumn leaves, the glistening city streets and rooftops, the ballet of sparrows around antennae, presented a bewildering sense of intrigue. Natural cycles are rarely considered in the urban environment. There is, however, relevance in the forms and occurrences that unfold there: rather than nature being less prevalent, constructed and constricted urban habitats heighten its visibility.

Our relationship to the environment has always been central in all creative endeavours. Richter draws our attention to Friedrich whose work has particular meaning for many artists today.

*A picture by Caspar David Friedrich is not a thing of the past, the only things of the past are some of the circumstances that caused it to come into being, e.g. certain ideologies. Over and above this, if it is good it affects us, above certain ideologies, as art, which we go to some lengths to defend (perceive, exhibit, and make). Thus one can paint like Caspar David Friedrich today.'*³⁰

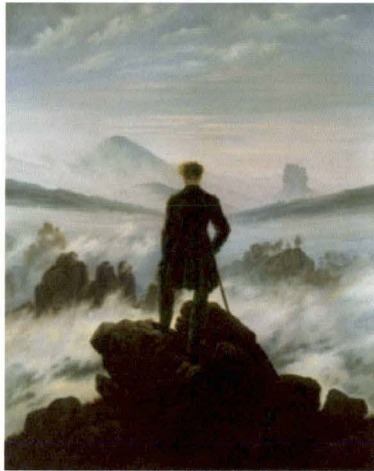


Fig.27 Caspar David Friedrich
Wanderer above the Sea of Fog, 1818

There is an important distinction between romantic ideas about landscapes in the past that imbued the image with religious symbolism and those of today which contextualise notions concerning contemporary spirituality - a relationship based on a strong affinity between the individual and their

²⁹ Lopez, Barry, personal journal entry, unable to trace source

environment.

The project seeks to arrive at images which interrogate existing conventions of the world; to do this through contemplation of what is presented; and to do so through experiencing the work within the gallery context. By evaluating, and re-presenting, the locale, this project deals with experiences common to all viewers, and yet presented as new and surprising.

Exploring an urban sense of place, and creating a visual poetic language through digital imaging and print processes required developing a different approach to engaging with the landscape. It was also essential to explore available imaging technologies and overcome the technological barriers that are so prevalent in contemporary experience of the world.

Technology as a guiding influence

A number of technological systems have been used. They included, but were not limited to, photography (analogue and digital), video (analogue and digital), painting; and, three generations of large format digital printers. Technology, however, is not the sole driving force; what is relevant is the human aspect of technology. Input/output devices are what shape the mental models of how we perceive and engage with, the world around us. In the context of this project, the technological devices that mediated experience were integrated into the process, and used to form a closer relationship to the environment. It was a way of increasing proximity to subjects, from which intimacy and knowledge evolved. The use of these systems has extended the capacity to represent subjective experience without breaking the union between mind and place.

Rather than operating as a means that distanced an observer or 'experiencer' from the environment, mechanical processes served to enhance this bond, by their use in transforming the 'moment' into a print image.

The objective was not to exclude the spectator from representation, but to

³⁰Morley, Simon, *The Friedrich Factor*, Contemporary Visual Arts, Issue 19, page26

create contemplative spaces in which to dwell on our contemporary landscape.

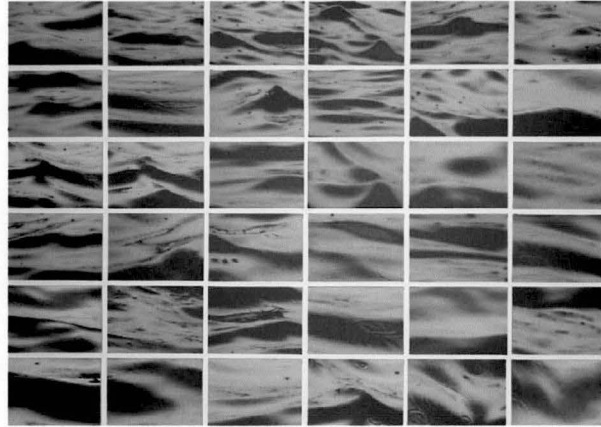


Fig.28

Troy Ruffels

Location III (Detail) 2000

It is part of a long standing tradition, and one of necessity or inevitability, that artists engage with technologies (abstract systems of order) to provide a clearer rationale through which to deal with their world. Imposing a system over the living world allows access into an otherwise incomprehensible, elusive and mysterious universe. Imaging technologies thereby become integrated into the fabric of visual culture.

Of particular relevance to this investigation were photography, film, video, and digital processes. It was important to develop an awareness of the world of images that these processes construct. Through their use, we become familiar with the characteristics of representation; understanding the technological translation of the visual, enables us to see, engage and assess the world of things in those terms. These processes inform the investigation just as they form part of a personal and subjective approach to seeing.

To explain the sequence:

- repeated exposure to, and contemplation of, specific locations and environments
- selection and capture; finding signifiers of place, capturing likely

material, consideration of the material in the studio (living with the image)
- further translation through reproductive processes; and assessment and reflection of proofs or artwork.

By continued involvement with the means, one comes to an understanding of translation and arrives at the point of 'seeing' in terms of the process.

Beyond testing the possibilities offered by new technologies, it has been important for artists to respond to a changing social vision and to relate this back to a larger history of perceptual ordering occurring in the visual field. At least in part, advances in imaging technologies frame the changing social vision and are identified with it.

Painting and Photography as markers

A key challenge of the project was to create a hybrid image that, while generated by recording apparatuses and processed without the direct intervention of the artist's hand, is capable of evoking the expressive and gestural aspects of painting, and of alluding to qualities usually associated with it. Further, it is an investigation that explores ways of combining the qualities of photography and painting in creating images that, while evoking the desired expressive quality of painting, maintain the validation of the particular, provided by photography.



Fig. 29,30 and 31
Troy Ruffels
from *Hood* series 2000

Painting is a broad term in contemporary visual practice. It is indicative of an approach to the world of image-making: a way of thinking through and processing the world. Douglas Fogle in *The Trouble with Painting* touched upon a contemporary attitude towards painting that relates to the role it plays within this project. Fogle referred to an essay by Howard Halle on the photography of Andreas Gursky. In reviewing the exhibition of Gursky's work Halle arrived at the conclusion that '*painting is a philosophical exercise that doesn't always involve paint.*' Halle was referring specifically to what he saw as the painterly mode of Gursky's photographic compositions. He saw it as:

*a way of organising the world that represents neither truth nor fiction exclusively but rather a little of both. Whether an artist uses a brush or a camera to achieve that goal scarcely matters.*³¹

The investigation adopted the idea of painting as a 'philosophical' exercise, although this project takes it beyond Gursky's painterly mode of composition and figure/ground relationships. In each of the steps in processing, which culminate in the digital print, a premium is placed upon spontaneity and expressive desire, upon surface and colour.

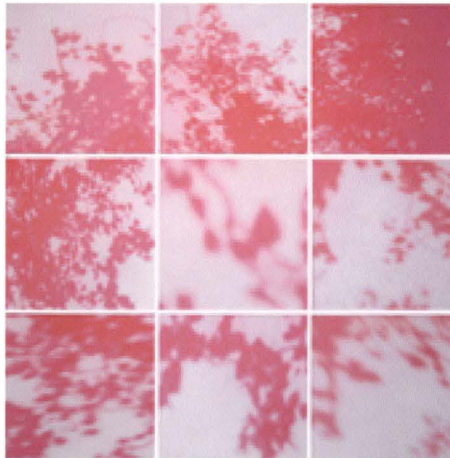


Fig.32

Troy Ruffels

Bonnet 1 2000

³¹ Fogle, Douglas, *The Trouble with Painting*, quoting Howard Halle from 'Painting at the End of the World, 2001, page 18

Painting and photography maintain an important status as markers; the project is not more closely aligned to one rather than the other, but shifts *between* them in an attempt to generate a method that reflects more appropriately subjective environmental experience.

The project focuses on exploring the computer's capacity for convergence as a possible solution to the above problems. The computer, together with software programs like Photoshop, and input accessories, including scanners and cameras, allows for a diverse range of visual material to be brought together. It is possible, for example, to construct an image composed from digital photographs, captured video images, and the tactile surface of paint on canvas.

Before considering the work and how it was pursued (Section 4) I will look at the related art context (Section 3).

SECTION 3

RELATED ART CONTEXT

Introduction

Despite what even many artists may appear to believe, art is not and should not merely be a skill. It should be completely and utterly the language of our feelings, our frame of mind³².

Caspar David Friedrich

The world exists in a constant process of change and transformation. We respond to our immediate surroundings, and to a technological interface that mediates and affects our engagement with place.

The work of the artists considered, is continually changing, shifting and altering in response to subjective experiences. There is something intimate and sensitive, even gentle about their engagement with their subjects - they attempt to slow down the viewer's gaze, to arrest it, capture it, and to open new worlds for contemplation.

Turner and Monet, for example, challenged preconceptions about the space that lies before us, exploring the elemental forces of nature through observations of changing light and its transformation through paint.

Likewise, Clemins, through her engagement with process, revisits the estranged landscape of vast and remote spaces. In contrast Horn lays stress on her active engagement with the environment, recognizing phenomena as arising from her intention to explore.

The journey is also an important metaphor in the context of Mylayne's work, while Gursky and Tillmans confront a contemporary world of image saturation, re-endowing it with meaning.

My connection with these artists results from their 'involvement' with place, and the processes through which they translate this experience into an image. A painting, or image of the world is arrived at that is porous; it breathes and

³²from journal notes, unable to trace source

changes, embracing metaphor, establishing links to the external world, conveying a sense of place, by the intimate engagement with elements in the contemporary landscape.

William Turner (1775-1851)

Turner was an observer of light and colour, and explored the means by which an artist can render or transmit the qualities of light and atmosphere into an image. He expressed the *mystery* of ephemeral nature, challenging preconceptions about the world of concrete forms, by dissolving all around him into an orchestrated symphony of light and colour. His art reminds us that visible nature, however dear to us, however glorious or beautiful, is still just a veil over an unseen universe.



Fig.33
William Turner
Landscape with Distant River and Bay, 1835

Claude Monet (1840-1926)

Monet valued the present moment for itself. Like Turner, he was an observer of light and colour, and the inter-relationship of each object and of the colour strokes of paint that represents them on canvas. Through acute observation, colour, atmosphere and ambience were translated into a painted image that captured the mood and atmosphere of the day in a way that challenges preconceptions about the space that lies before us.

Monet's importance to this project relates to many of the strategies employed

in his painting of the world:

- returning to the same subject again and again
- a fresh, unconventional vision
- objects as paint (tone, colour hue, saturation, thickness)
- juxtapositions or neighbourhood interactions
- capturing fleeting effects of light, ocean spray, smoke, the effects of mood of the day and its emotional effects on the artist
- depicting the texture of the air.



Fig.34

Claude Monet

Branch of the Seine near Giverny (Mist), 1897

Gerhard Richter (1932-)

Richter is a constant experimenter with the effects of oil paint and with the painting of images from photographs in many of their various forms to coarse newspaper reproductions. Much of his work has an uneasy edge through the convergence of such images as depicted in paint.

What is important about Richter in the context of this project is that many of his marks possess an uneasy tension through their dual reference: 'photo look' paintings. Photo-Realism replicated the capacity of the photograph for intricate

detail. Richter on the other hand, used the qualities, the plasticity of oil paint to summon up a whole gamut of appearances associated with the photograph.



Fig.35
Gerhard Richter
Seestück (Seascape) (376), 1975

Richter achieved a convergence between the photographic document and painting. While his approach and medium is different to the methodology employed by this project there are similarities with his use and fusion of the photograph as document, and its translation into paint.

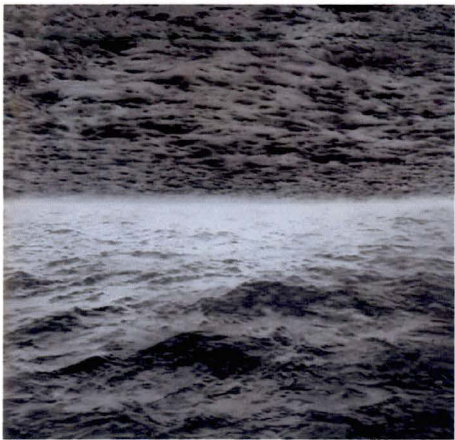


Fig.36 and 37
Gerhard Richter
Seascape (Sea-Sea) [Seestück (See-See)] 1970 and 1998

Nicky Hodge, Alice Stepanek (1954) and Steven Maslin (1959)

The work of Nicky Hodge and that of Alice Stepanek and Steven Maslin (who work in tandem) explore some of the questions that Richter's photo paintings raise, creating an uneasy tension between photographic qualities and painterly expression. Whereas the intimate paintings of Hodge quietly cause us to re-engage with the world, Stepanek and Maslin exploit our expectations of the photographic scene.



Fig.38

Alice Stepanek and Steven Maslin

geen uitleen of verkoop Afmetingen, 1998

Stepanek and Maslin's large scenic paintings, for example, reflect the *speed of the everyday*, employing devices, like blurring or smudging, to re-orientate our engagement with the image. Carefully rendered simulation of photographic detail is contrasted against painterly marks. Roy Exley draws our attention to the paradoxical result:

The detail imparted by Stepanek and Maslin in these painting arrests the urge to scan, instead inviting a more interrogative gaze. As in the film still we are offered access to the subliminal.³³

³³Roy Exley, *Distant Landscapes*, CVA , Issue 27 , page



Fig. 39 and 40

Alice Stepanek and Steven Maslin

geen uitleen of verkoop Afmetingen, 1998

In contrast to the scenes of Stepanek and Maslin, Nicky Hodge works on a small scale, producing paintings in series. Her work reflects an engagement with the transitory and fleeting nature of the contemporary world. Her subjects are often generated from views of ordinary locations passed by or overlooked. There is a direct connection between Hodge's approach and my work. - I seek to slow things down, to invite the viewer to meditate on a detail that exists in the familiar urban environment.



Fig. 41, 42 and 43

Nicky Hodge

Flowerbed series, 2000

In her work we are offered fragments of views, and must *imagine* the whole by filling in the gaps. Detail is erased as the paintings give the impression that they were *grabbed* from a speeding car. We are left with impressions of the landscape, pared down to basic forms. Their small scale invites intimate inspection; the only conclusions that can be reached, however, require the viewer to draw from their own memory.

Vija Celmins (1939 -)

Whether paintings, drawings or prints, Vija Celmin's images hover beneath a screen - of process - frequently appearing distant and remote. Like Nicky Hodge, Celmins presents us with the desire for an intimate engagement with the work - physically and metaphorically linking us to the external world. Both

artists cause us to dwell on the subject, to draw on memory, in order to bring it into the present.

In some respects they are standard romantic metaphors - a confrontation with vast empty landscapes symbolising the philosophical implications of humankind's estrangement from the world.³⁴

Celmin's work conflates the macro and micro, her patient and infinitely intimate visions are not mere observation. Each has a quality of memory or the nostalgic in it. The starscapes for example, despite her subtle use of colour, are no longer the way we conceive of space. We now know it as deep-space telescopes display it to us, as brilliantly coloured billows and explosions of spectral nebular gasses. Her oceans meditate on process, tidal pressures that build and subside, and her spiders webs are blocked with a humid, soft-focus density.³⁵ world.



Fig. 44,45 and 46

Vija Celmins

Untitled (large desert drawing) 1974-75, *Untitled 8* 1995-96 , *Ocean Surfaces* 2000

³⁴ Patrick, Keith, *Formal Dress*, Contemporary Visual Art, Issue 26, page 50

³⁵ Gerard Haggerty writes in *Art in America*, March, 1989: ' . . . what Celmins renders with exquisite care are not things, but forms and patterns of energy: tides, celestial gravity, evaporation, erosion. Whereas photos fracture the moment, these paintings condense time. It is not just that they are built, layer upon layer, in a time-consuming process, though this commitment on the artist's art is obviously great. The small size of these paintings makes it seem as if Celmins were concerned with the artful placement of every molecule of paint. In fact, the final skin of oil paint is the accumulation of many layers that have been painted, sanded down, and repainted. Her resonant darks and the soft coronas around her stars are a product of this relentless repainting. The resulting sense of space is extremely convincing. The subjects Celmins chooses to paint-a star-filled quadrant of the cosmos, where distance is measured in terms of light-years, or a fragment of the endless sea, . . . all evoke infinity.'

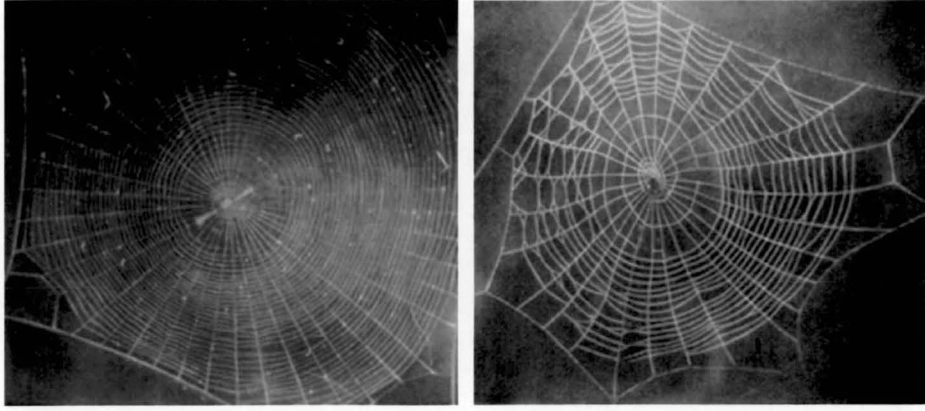


Fig. 47 and 48

Vija Celmins

Web 2 and *Web 1* 2000

Web series, a set of detailed, soft focus mezzotints, offers a glimpse of a tangible form with which most of us would be familiar. The recognisable subject matter, whether disaster scenes, nebular starscapes, ocean expanses or intricately woven spider's webs, plays a pivotal role orientating our engagement with the work.

Roni Horn (1955 -)

*I want to make sensible experience more present. People have much more knowledge than they realize. I try to reach the viewer by addressing the bodily and not just the mental/nonphysical being. The viewer must take responsibility for being there, otherwise there is nothing there.*³⁶

Roni Horn's work relates to a process of examining things and events in their essence and mapping the connections between them. Horn draws out, not a prescribed order or unifying system, but a relationary history in which events exist in a condition where all things are perpetually moving, metamorphosing, and transforming from one state to another. In contrast to Nicky Hodge, Horn *observes the world not through a window or in this case the camera lens, but by inhabiting it*³⁷. She insists on the primacy of actual experience, which is, as

³⁶ Schwendener, Martha, *Roni Horn Art and Synthesis*, Flash Art, March/April 2001, page 80

³⁷ Schwendener, Martha, *Roni Horn Art and Synthesis*, Flash Art, March/April 2001, page 80

Wallace Stevens insists, the '*sense which exceeds all metaphor*'³⁸ to locate correspondences between the nub of perceptual experience and expression. As Horn admits: '*I'm more concerned with human consciousness and the way it synthesises experience*'.³⁹

Synthesis is a significant aspect of the work. As Martha Schwender comments, Horn draws our attention to the connection between art and human materials '*to demonstrate that we possess synthetic identities and consciousness; not static, but mutable hybrids, cobbled together from spare bits and parts like a book, a poem, or a dream*'⁴⁰. By continually transforming, composing, and arranging elements, a path takes form that suggests the interconnected nature of all things.

*A path. Drive it, walk it, take it to be somewhere. When you're on a path, you're in the place you're in. There's no distinction between the path and the place itself...Sometimes a path is nothing but an indication on a map, the reality having been blown or washed away...The path can only be where it is and nowhere else: the path is dedicated.*⁴¹

The unique character and success of Horn's work depends on her ability to express experience metaphorically, and to amplify and preserve the essence of discoveries and observations about our relationship to place.



Fig.49

Roni Horn

You are the Weather 1994-95 (Detail)

There is also her use of multiple images to establish a set of relations, to imply transformation, and to establish a primarily atmospheric narrative. For

³⁸ Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, Vintage Books, New York, 1990, page 430

³⁹ Schwender, Martha, *Roni Horn Art and Synthesis*, Flash Art, March/April 2001, page 80

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ Horn, Roni, *Roni Horn, interview by Lynne Cooke*, Phaidon Press Ltd, 2000, page 60

example, her photographic installation, *You Are The Weather* 1994-95, consisting of 100 colour photographs (portraits) and silver gelatin prints. Images of a single subject photographed repeatedly over years under varying conditions transforming the portrait of the subject, *Margaret*, into a metaphor for time, and transformation. Each image is defined not only by itself but by those on either side; the series seems to emerge; subtle transitions evolve between expressions and the nature and formal characteristics of the photograph.



Fig.50

Roni *Horn*

You are the Weather 1994-95 (Detail)

Some Thames, 2000 shows a variety of shots of the river's surface: different colours, ripples, patterns, mood and textures emerge creating a range of atmospheres and readings. It reaffirms Horn's interest in a mutable landscape, one that can only be represented by being aware of the play and transformation of elements. The series comprises 90 plus photographs documented over two seasons in 1999. Each portrait shows water and only water, with the very occasional bit of froth, or dirt, or oil slick, or a branch reflected and refracted by waves. There are subtle differences between the images; the direction of the ripples, the shades of gray, the cross-hatching that indicates a gust of wind- all of which became more pronounced the longer you look at them.

Like Hiroshi Sugimoto in his Barren seascapes, Horn has found a way to convey something which is at the same time empty and full. I understood why, when we are looking for answers, we stare for hours at the point where water meets land, where the sublime meets the everyday.

Jean-Luc Mylayne (1946 -)

Mylayne, a photographer, uses his observations of birds to explore his place in the world. He travels throughout Europe for weeks and months on end to follow the daily patterns of his subject.

The appeal of Mylaynes's imagery is the intimacy with which we confront the subject and the veracity of the photographic document. His photographs present us with intimate moments in time that draw us close to the subject matter.

Each of his unique photographs represents not merely the one-thousandth of a second it takes for the camera to click its shutter but also the days, weeks, and months of devotion and patience it takes to build a bond of trust with a subject. The crux of his work is the moment at which the bird returns the gaze of the photographer. It is a glance not of hostility or mistrust but of recognition.⁴²



Fig.51

Jean-Luc Mylayne

No C4 Juillet Août 1982

Mylayne does not pursue his subjects with a telephoto lens, and is not searching

⁴²Barbara Gladstone Gallery, exhibition review, quoting Mark Dion
www.gladstonegallery.com/exhibit_pages/exbjlm.html

for the exotic or the unusual. It is rather a reciprocal relationship between the photographer and environment. The intense proximity of Mylayne to his subject is clear when, in some photographs, you catch his image reflected back in the bird's eye. At other times, the bird is partially obscured by foliage, caught in mid-flight, or tiny within the frame, so that you struggle to find it hidden within its natural habitat. ⁴³

Andreas Gursky (1955 -)



Fig. 52

Andreas Gursky

Rhine , 1996

Gursky's originality lies in the vividness with which he has distilled compelling images from the plenitude of a commercialised image world. Gursky often approaches '*our surroundings as if they existed under glass be it a vitrine, the windshield of a car, a television or computer screen, or a security monitor. It's not a matter of seeing reality as packaged goods, but of realising that our gaze itself is a kind of stylised container*'⁴⁴.

He refines his images with the aid of subtle digital massaging.

⁴³At heart, Jean-Luc Mylayne's art is a conceptual project, which addresses the philosophical and experiential phenomenon of time.

⁴⁴Rugoff, Ralph. '*World Perfect, Ralph Rugoff on Andreas Gursky*', Frieze, Contemporary Art and Culture, issue 43, November, December 1998, page 52.

He has used digital technology since 1992 to '*remove unwanted elements from his composition, streamlining them into a package of contemporaneity.*'⁴⁵



Fig. 53

Andreas Gursky
Chicago Board of Trade II, 1999

The detail of his work, and the increasingly abstract compositions invite interrogation while effecting a kind of slowing down of the gaze.

Gursky is quoted as saying:

*My preference for clear structures is the result of my desire - perhaps illusory - to keep track of things and maintain my grip on the world...this has lead to the pursuit of increasingly abstract compositions.*⁴⁶

Wolfgang Tillmans (1968 -)

Tillmans seeks beauty in the everyday world, often finding it in the most fleeting or elusive moments of contemporary life. His photographs are glimpses of life, and yet each glimpse has an immediacy that erases the usual distance between viewer and image, transporting us instantly into the scene.

Tillmans has developed a 'snap-shot aesthetic'; a carefully staged and structured technique designed to give the appearance of unpremeditated spontaneity. His goal is to challenge conventional aesthetics or codes of representation. His choice of subject matter, from the shocking to the banal, confronts conventions of what constitutes a valid subject and how it should be

⁴⁵ ibid

⁴⁶ ibid

photographed.



Fig.54 and 55

Wolfgang Tillmans

Untitled (La Gomera), 1997 and *Concorde L449-6*, 1997

The relationship between 'artificiality' and 'naturalness', as Tillmans describes it, is at the heart of his work. His photographs often present us with familiar urban sights, but, as Tillmans has said, '*only in rare moments does the nature of a person or cityscape reveal itself*'. After one of these moments, Tillmans returns to re-stage the event using the extreme artificiality of the medium to create something apparently momentary and unmediated. He deliberately tries to remove the layers between the viewer and the image:

*If something looks real then it is actually much more powerful because people believe that it really happened, and once something has happened it can't be undone. I am after authenticity of intent, but I've never been after authenticity of subject; I'm after universal truth, but not truth of that moment.*⁴⁷

There is a sense of poetry in many of Tillman's photographs, which seem to

⁴⁷ ibid

suspend us in the present moment.

Olafur Eliasson (1967 -)

Olafur Eliasson's materials are elemental and ephemeral: light, heat, moisture, steam, and ice are manipulated by the artist towards aesthetic ends and in response to a specific site. His work navigates a space between nature and technology, the organic and the industrial.



Fig.56
Olafur Eliasson
Your natural denudation inverted, 1999 (installation view)

Eliasson has spent years photographing his native Icelandic landscape. Often arranged in grid configurations, the images record geographical formations that are characteristic of the terrain. Each series focuses on a single aspect of the land - ice, islands, or caves. With these groups, individual photographs document specific places at particular moments. But when viewed together, the works describe broader themes. Nature is shown in a process of constant change. Shifting patterns of light, shape, and colour emerge when pictures are placed side by side, and the specifics of a single image give way to an overall subtlety and abstraction. Eliasson's work is not simply a documentation of the details of nature, but attempts to foster a more complete visual experience that transcends the subject.

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, these artists have influenced me in various and interrelated ways.

SECTION 4

METHODOLOGY

General Comments on methodologies employed throughout the Project

Strategies were employed within the context of environmental interaction, and studio practice:

- to break habits and cultivate openness of perception
- to increase diversity in approach to subject matter and image forms
- to increase spontaneous interaction and intuitive response
- to heighten the expressive and emotive capacity of the artwork
- to investigate the convergent potential of image forms through the use of digital imaging.



Fig.57

Troy Ruffels

Location I, 1998

Spontaneity of Expression

The approach taken towards image-making and content was to consider a range of media in a similar way; results and responses are not predetermined but are discovered during the process. Such an approach relies on spontaneous expression and its capacity for making connections that are often non-linear and not necessarily logical. The purpose of the creative processes employed was to heighten this channel of intuitive decision making, and to balance it with

critical reflection.

There is a broad framework that receives attention during critical reflection, while intuition guides the actual process. Chance is welcome. 'What if' is an ever-present question, which fosters intuition and is the key to an experimental approach.

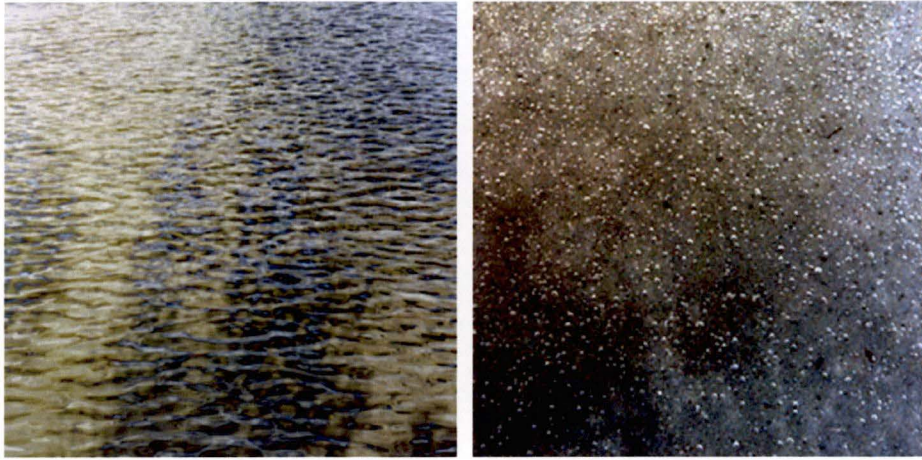


Fig. 58,59

Troy Ruffels

Reflection study, 1999, *Icepond study*, 2002

Convergence

Essential to the aims of this project is the capacity to fuse expressive and spontaneous qualities associated with painting with the veracity associated with photographic documentation. Spontaneity and veracity are properties attributed to the respective media. It was not a matter of combining two stylistically different images by layering or collaging but rather the challenge was to create artworks, which carried the semblance of each and to achieve this convergence without an outward appearance of contrivance.

The desired duality dictated the strategies adopted in each step of the production cycle. These included:

- spontaneity in capturing source material
- care combining knowledge and intention in selection, digital conversion, manipulation and transformation of images

- through research, the selection of the most suitable printing process and print media
- the final presentation chosen to enhance desired qualities.

Undoubtedly digital conversion, with its extraordinary manipulative capacity, greatly assists the convergence of visual forms, of content and of a variety of media. However in the course of the project, it became apparent that the convergent intention needed to shape every step. Only by adopting this method could a natural, fluid result be obtained.

Spontaneity began when the image was captured in the field; and passion was an essential part of the response to place. The selection process brought such characteristics to the fore and subsequent computer manipulation sought to preserve and enhance them.

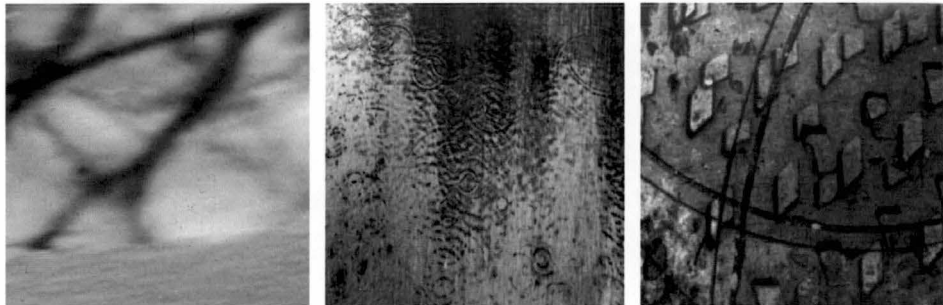


Fig.60
Troy Ruffels
Pavement series, 1998

Because cameras and video (lens capture) were employed in the field, the source material carried some semblance to photography. Again, preserving this was a factor in subsequent processing. The intrinsic qualities of the source medium were integrated as part of the methodology and did not need to be simulated later. Manipulation was concerned with preservation and enhancement rather than artifice.

Bringing urban environmental experience into the studio

Source material was gathered in a number of ways from the urban environment to bring into the studio. These included mental images logged away, notes written on-site during field excursions, and photographic or video documentation. The range of methods employed reflects a range of responses

to sensory experience.

The 'field trips' (comprising daily journeys along familiar pathways through the urban environment) were about understanding the nature of the place and also registering feelings and associations. The concrete side of the exploration was the image-gathering and the hunt for suitable visual metaphors.

These methods assisted in making the transition between environmental experience and studio practice. A lot of fieldwork is about observation, understanding the environment, discerning features: objects, light, shadow, reflection, harmonies, textures, surfaces and special relationships. It is about the interaction and correspondences between atmospheric conditions and forms in the environment, and about change and transformation.

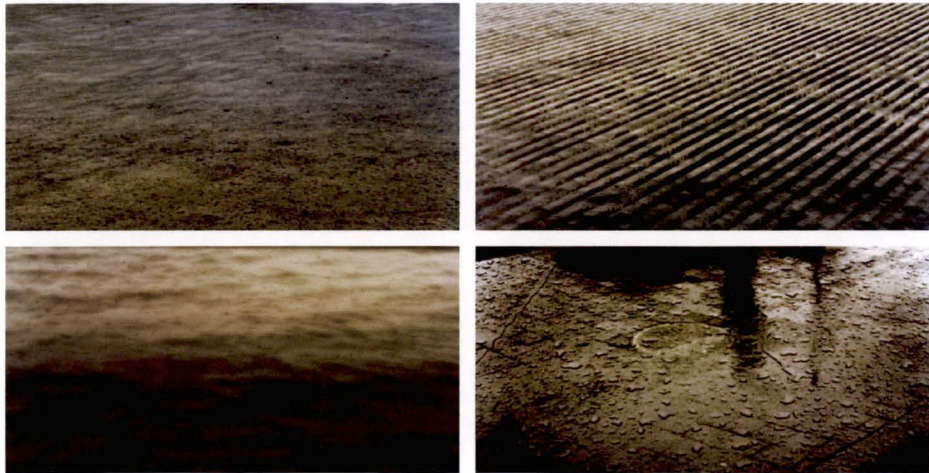


Fig.61

Troy Ruffels

from *Breach* series, 1999

Perception of the environment is mediated by ways of seeing that develop over time. While working on the project it has been vital to be *open* to possibilities and this openness needs to be cultivated and constantly reactivated.

Repeat visits allow for a deeper understanding. Revisiting is important in shaping the way we experience the world, and reflects the way knowledge of a place accumulates. Through repetition a more comprehensive understanding of

events unfolding in the urban environment can be gained. This becomes more intimate with each encounter: features become old friends, and engaging with place, on a level that grows more familiar, relationships become tangible.

Although the visual evidence from this is in the form of photographic material, the project is not primarily photographic in nature. For example, in using cameras, there is no conscious attempt to frame, compose or make a photographic image on the spot. It is simply a way of gathering source material: and bringing the raw material into the studio for further consideration and deliberation. It is in the studio that images are composed, cropped, framed and manipulated.

Recording devices and environmental interaction

Interaction with the environment varies dramatically depending on whether one is using a still or video, analogue or digital, camera, and the effect of these devices reveals differing possibilities. Advantages have been found in using a variety of cameras.

The use of a camera alters the nature of our engagement with the environment. In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* Dillard differentiates between two ways of seeing and makes an analogy between ways of seeing and walking with and without a camera. *'Seeing is of course very much a matter of verbalisation. Unless I call my attention to what passes before my eyes, I simply won't see it...I have to maintain in my head a running description of the present'*.⁴⁸ Dillard notes that there is another way of seeing that involves a *'letting go.'* A mode of observation where the observer is transfixed, their mind emptied of the scrutiny of observation.⁴⁹

Beyond these modes of engagement, different forms of lens capture devices incite varying kinds of interaction that direct attention focussing on

⁴⁸ Dillard, Annie, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, page 31

⁴⁹ *The difference between the two ways of seeing is the difference between walking with and without a camera. When I walk with a camera I walk from shot to shot, reading the light on a calibrated meter. When I walk without a camera, my own shutter opens, and the moment's light prints on my own silver gut.*

characteristics operating in the landscape.

Working with a video camera, that yields the possibility of 25 image frames for every second of recorded time, encourages a fluid engagement with the space or subject of interest; events and occurrences unfold, each image flows into the next. Rather than trying to isolate a moment, the real subject is time and place. Every frame is generated live, mediated by the apparatus whether recording or not.⁵⁰

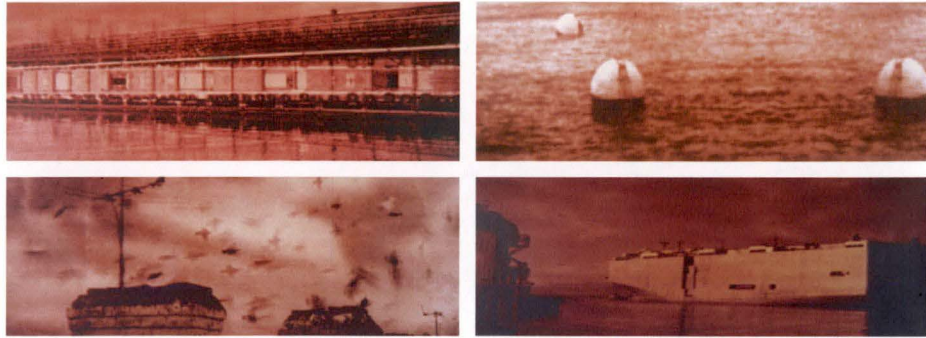


Fig.62

Troy Ruffels

from *Leaf* series, 1997

As well as the various interactions that recording devices encourage in the observer, each has distinctive pictorial traits that determine appearances. Resolution, enlargement, colour, pixelation, and grain are factors, which will vary subtly or greatly with each type of camera.

In the end selection of a range of devices, with which one has extensive practical experience, frees the artist to think in terms of the end product. Experience with a comparatively limited range of equipment and processes

⁵⁰In his book, *Reason for Knocking at an Empty House*, Viola refers to the critic Robert Arns. 'in film the basic illusion of movement is produced by the succession of still images flashing on the screen. In Video "STILLNESS" is the basic illusion: a still image does not exist because the video signal is in constant motion scanning across the screen'... The subsequent evolution of video has been aimed at improving control over this continually moving system, in other words increasing control over time... One of the most fascinating aspects of videos evolution and the one that makes it different from film is subsequently, that the video image existed for many years before a way was developed to record it. In other words it is live, simultaneous with experience. Taping or recording it was not an integral part of the system. Film is not film unless it is filming (recording). Video, however, is videoing all the time, continually in motion putting out 30 frames a second. The image one sees on the monitor is not really an image at all, but the precise and extremely rapid tracing of a glowing

allows an artist to estimate the effects in advance.

Evolution in Subject Matter

During the investigation, attention shifted to focus on a range of forms, atmospheric qualities and harmonic characteristics that unfolded in the urban environment of Hobart. The evolution in subject matter was not straightforward but followed a subjective path that was responsive to work as it developed.

A number of themes and subjects emerged during the meandering exploration of Hobart environments. These included:

- poetic motifs: clusters of starlings, autumn leaves, reflective surfaces
- specific sites of interest: For example, The Queen's Domain Woodland Reserve and grasslands, and urban streets
- ephemeral phenomena: winter rain, wind in trees, the line of a falling leaf, light in eucalypt leaves, and movement through the environment.

It encompassed naturally observed phenomena, mediated by the mechanism of capture; or the influence of artificial objects in the environment, for example, seeing a reflection in the enamel duco of a car bonnet, or the landscape through a car or bus window.

Atmospheric change maintained a high level of importance as the condition of transformation in the urban landscape was observed and included:

- the ethereal qualities of harmony, pattern and rhythm as they unfold in space and time
- their impact upon forms in the landscape, e.g., the quality of light, the changing seasons, the movement of cloud, the onset of rain, time of day and its relationship to the angle of light, and the 'colour' of the day.

phosphor dot. Due to persistence of human vision, one sees a complete image which is really nothing more than a rapidly moving point of light. Pages 63-64

In reviewing images it is clear that each day has its own colour and weight, a warm, cool or neutral hue that imbues it with emotive associations. One becomes sensitive to these atmospheric qualities - and they are exaggerated when viewed as captured images through lens-based devices.

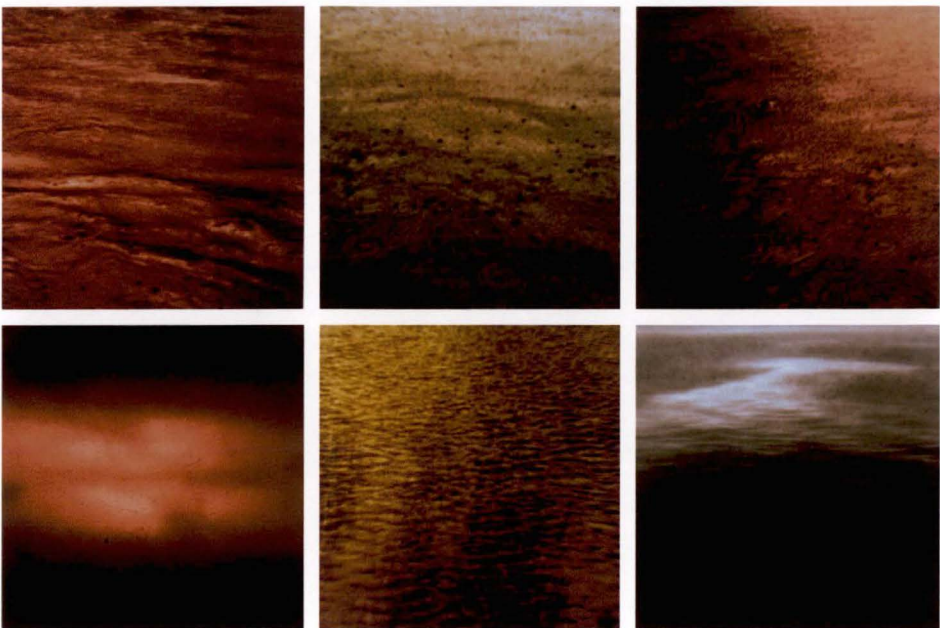


Fig.63
Troy Ruffels
from *Near Horizon* series, 1998

Reflections offer often brief windows through which to view the world; in them forms and shapes merge, and unexpected associations with metaphorical overtones surface. The harbour water, small pools on street pavements, glass and metallic structures located in the city's heart, polished enamel or worn metallic panels of cars that reflect the sky or branches, clear perspex bus shelters, beading with spherical droplets of water or scratched with graffiti. These surfaces all share the common property of a shallow depth.

*There was a reflection, but like Monet's Waterlily paintings this reflection was not so much on the surface but caught in the shallows, hovering in limbo.*⁵¹

⁵¹Troy Ruffels, personal writings, 1999



Fig.64

Troy Ruffels

Branch study, 1999

The special quality of reflection is a transparency that with a subtle shift in focal length reveals the material nature of the reflective surface. It could be a car bonnet where image and surface intermingle depending on angle and light; or a pool of water where a clear, near-perfect reflection reveals the rough and cracked texture of the pavement and debris beneath. Alternatively, the image may hover and float on the surface of the harbour water, twisting and stretching in response to the undulation of currents and the movement of tides.

There were other qualities of equal importance to the work. These included time, harmony, movement and transformation; but they were only made visible by working through one of the previously mentioned stimuli. e.g. tracing the trajectory and pattern of starlings as they move across a winter sky with the almost magical changes to the airborne flock-shape; the instantaneous flip brought about by directional change: these are more about time and movement than about the starlings as subject. Similarly, mapping the transformation of form caused by variations in angle and light moving towards, or passing by, the reflection that a plane tree casts in a puddle of water, is largely about the transitional stages of a subject and how movement and atmospheric conditions influence its appearance.

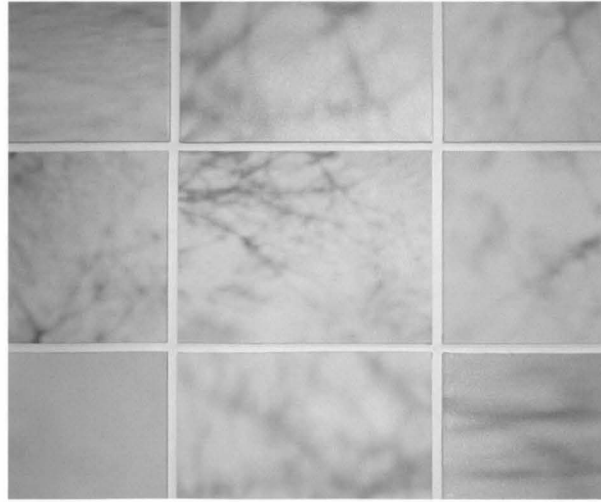


Fig.65

Troy Ruffels

Reflection II (detail), 1999

The rationale that guided change throughout the project was a response to experience of the environment. Over time this shifted back and forwards among the concerns mentioned above; from finding a subject that compelled attention, to developing a work where this took on new meaning as it intermingled with other concerns; an increasingly interpretive and reductive strategy evolved. This was necessary in order to preserve the poetic essence that the work was seeking to express, and is one of the predominant Western visual art strategies.

Development of Image Language

The question was how to bring to an image the full complexity of urban experience, while distilling it into a simple and poetic form? Repetition and the use of the grid were partly linked to an attempt to achieve this, relating the image back to a contemporary sense of time and movement, while maintaining its emotive core. The use of the computer was paramount. It encouraged the cross-fusion of divergent image sources and allowed the potential characteristics relating to both painting and photography to be explored.

The evolved strategies developed imagery specifically for the project. Decisions at every stage were based on a number of criteria. Seeing an image on screen

provided a sense of whether it was an appropriate source, capable of yielding the associations required for ongoing development.

Familiarity helps one understand what will, or will not, work as a print image; at least within the aims set by this project. This became more and more subtle as the process developed. Colour matching and tonal properties were of fundamental importance. Attention to the subtlety of this interaction has been a priority since the artwork began.

Scale was important from the beginning as it assisted in creating an immersive space, which corresponded to the original experience and its translation into an artwork. Also, in enlarging the scale of images, image characteristics change, and it was paramount that the initial tests were carried out on a 1:1 ratio scale.



Fig.66

Troy Ruffels

Reflection II, 1999

Layering was also much more than a technical process for building up the image or the surface of the work. It related to the experience of place, and operated on a metaphorical level in addition to being a technical procedure. Experience is multi-faceted, a compound layering of space, time, and memory. Each image was suspended in frozen motion. The result: a vernacular of urban experience, an inventory of images and signifiers.

An overview of formal strategies employed in studio practice

In this subsection various formal strategies employed throughout the course of the project are considered.

Repetition

Repetition evolved as an important component of the investigation. It functions at an experiential level, as part of the process through which environmental knowledge is gained; and, through which one becomes familiar with place on an intimate level. Repetition is also mirrored in the studio environment where it is employed in the work's formal structure and composition: images are presented as component parts of a grid structure, or as an inter-related sequence.

Engaging with place in a way that makes the area more familiar with each encounter, our perceptions of relationships intensify, and become meaningful. As knowledge becomes localised, so smaller and smaller connections become visible. Attention shifts to focus on details, minor events and nuances.

Duration

Duration of experience and the length of engagement, are other ways in which knowledge may be gained. This operates in a similar way to repetition. It is cumulative and comes through observing or engaging with an environment or subject over time. It gives us another layer of experiential knowledge and increases our sensitivity to pattern, harmony and rhythm. As an everyday example our eyes, given time, will adjust to dim lighting, and notice shapes and forms that initially remained imperceptible to us. Equally one can learn to abstract the essentials of colour, shape etc.

The Grid

Initially the grid was employed as a device to achieve larger scale imagery with the available processes. Highly visible as the narrow spaces between the print images, the grid became an active part of the artwork.

The gridded layout allowed easy comparisons between the images, while it provided the opportunity to synchronise the total composition in terms of tonality and movement.

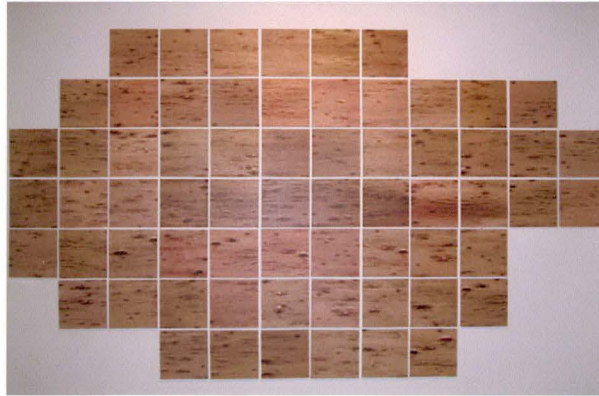


Fig.67
Troy Ruffels
Location I, 1998

Because the grid represented a constant pictorial plane, emphasis in turn was placed upon the degree of depth signified by each separate print image. This variable pictorial space was worked into the total composition.

Technical Parameters

A range of image capturing and digital outputting devices together with the software used in image manipulation, was explored in the course of the investigation. Within these parameters alternative methodologies for the production of visual art prints were developed. At certain stages, new hardware became accessible which warranted changes in my working process, and certain innovations and products came into being or became redundant - all of these factors exerted some impact on the progress of the project and the path it followed.

The transition (from the experience and the capturing of an image, to the scanning of it into the computer, and reworking it before printing it again) served as a way of bringing feelings associated with the initial encounter back into the world.

No device or item of equipment was pursued in isolation. There was considerable interaction between each stage of image making. Changes of any procedure meant adjustments in the following stages.

Digital Imaging

At a basic level the computer, loaded with the appropriate software, allows the operator to bring together images, to manipulate radically, to transform and to move appearances across genre or media. The computer weaves together a diverse range of materials into new and varied configurations. Photoshop was the primary software application used in the manipulation of images. Among its key features are the layering tools available for creating composite images built up from multiple layers, filtered by screens. Each layer, depending on the screen, affects the information that is revealed. Layers remain separate so that adjustments to colour, contrast, focus and resolution can be made at any stage throughout the process.

In the course of the investigation layering manifested itself in ways which suggested techniques of glazing and overprinting employed in painting and print-making.

Digital imaging technology in the form of editing software (such as Photoshop) increases selective and creative options. Artists are able to crop and enlarge sections of an image with more ease. One of the major advantages is the capacity to try a range of manipulations without losing the original. It encourages the 'what if' approach.

Experiments in glazing and customised inks (also printer modification)

The tactile quality of the printed image remained important throughout. Surface character was affected by manipulation to the image prior to printing, and by interventions at print stage.

A significant part of the investigation explored avenues of convergence for producing images in a way that breaks down the barrier that separates painting

from photography.

Early on this involved a continuation of the layering of inks and the use of various canvas supports using large format digital. This work was carried out in direct relation to an ARC⁵² project at the Tasmanian School of Art running in the Digital Art Research Facility, Hobart.



Fig.68

Digital Art Research facility

A0 Encad Novajet III - during overprinting 1997

When experimenting with various methods for the development of images using large format inkjet printers, quick studies and large works were pursued simultaneously. Full-scale tests and prints were favoured, as the impact of increasing scale was often unpredictable. As a working process it meant that an image was pursued at length in a painterly way that allowed the possibility for correction and compensation at various stages.⁵³

Support media

The choice of canvas as the predominant support was arrived at for a number of reasons. Initially it was necessitated by the need for a surface that was compatible with the glazing process. Canvas, unlike paper, was able to hold a large quantity of ink without buckling or muddying. It also created an ambiguity - the tooth and texture of its surface drew attention to the picture plane - and it modified the photographic 'look'. This ambiguity, between the image as

⁵²Australian Research Council

⁵³ Discussed in detail in Appendix 3

painting and as photographically generated, significantly altered the reading of the image.

Evolution of digital printers

A diversity of output devices and printers was pursued during the investigation. These ranged from dye-sublimation printers to the three successive large format inkjet printers that were available during the project.⁵⁴ Each of these devices differed in subtle ways, and this naturally influenced the progress of the work. A body of work was developed with a particular printer and its characteristics in mind.⁵⁵

⁵⁴An A0 Nova-Jet printer, a 50-inch Nova-Jet Pro-50 printer, and a Roland Hi-Fi Jet 6 colour printer.

⁵⁵The A0 Nova-Jet printer with individual ink cartridges was more sympathetic to experimenting with inks and layering processes. The Nova-Jet Pro-50, with graphic quality inks in large reservoirs was able to generate more vibrant colours. While the Roland Hi-Fi, a 6 colour printer, was able to create softer transitions and more satisfying pastel colours because of the nature of the opaque inks used in processes. The change in technology altered the forces that actively shaped the work. One example was the shift from the 4 colour Nova-Jet dye based printers to the 6 colour Roland Hi-Fi printer that used pigmented inks. This shift both increased the capacity to render higher quality images and increased the ability to work with softer colour. At the same time it limited the luminosity, and vibrancy of the print that dye based ink jet printers are capable of achieving. Pigment inks are considerably more stable than the earlier dye based inks, which discoloured within a few weeks of exposure to daylight.

SECTION 5

IN THE STUDIO

Introduction

The studio investigation examines in detail the decision-making process, the choice of subject matter and the motivation behind each work and is designed to illustrate a particular relationship to environmental experience and the correspondences that occur in its expression in print media. The work developed through a number of distinct but related artworks. Digital technology facilitated the convergence between some of the diverse tenets of painting and the dexterity of photography with its acceptance as a validating document. Through the studio investigation the capacity for digital media to stimulate alternate ways of thinking about, and constructing, images that heighten our capacity to interpret and express our responses was explored.

Many concepts in life and art resist precise definition. In translating the phenomena of experience into a 2-D image the artist encounters a number of problems, often relating to qualities that are by nature immaterial.

It has been a major challenge to achieve correspondences which work cohesively between the various elements and their representation.



Fig.69

Troy Ruffels

from *Leaf* series, 1997

STAGE 1 - *Leaf* series, 1997



Fig.70

Troy Ruffels

Leaf series, 1997 (Installation)

Through presenting images as an inter-related sequence, the first series of work attempted to convey the temporal nature of our experience of the urban landscape. Ways of developing composite images were explored, woven together from a multitude of lens-based source material using tools available in Photoshop. Of particular interest was the way layers of information interacted, and the subtle degree to which images could be brought together without obviously disrupting the pictorial space. A range of cameras was used to gather source material over a period of time. Examples include images collected over several months of sparrows and starlings dancing around a rooftop antenna overlooked from the balcony where I was living. Others were the demolition and re-building of the Elizabeth Street Pier over a period of several months, which I documented at various stages of re-construction; and a container ship that visited the port once every 4 months, its giant hull standing above most of the waterfront buildings.

Despite numerous attempts to work in colour, the result was problematic - the appearance of the image, when in full colour, was always too naturalistic, too close to reality and to a conventional reading of the image. It also caused imaging difficulties, leading to too-apparent visible manipulation. The use of tonal images reduced this problem and changes in perspective and point of view

were also employed.

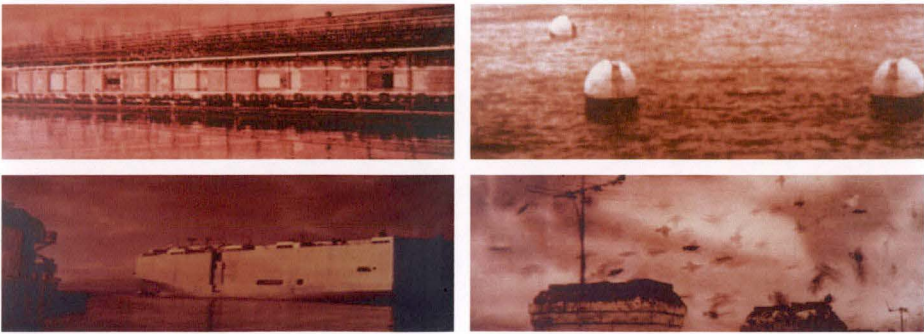


Fig. 71
Troy Ruffels
from *Leaf* series, 1997

An introduction to overprinting⁵⁶

This first stage of the project was a continuation of the procedures that began during my Honours course, extending the methodology for overprinting using an A0 Nova-Jet large format inkjet printer, and a range of suitable inks and supports.

The process involved the use of transparent inks to build up an image by printing single colours one upon the other. The optical mixing of colour that occurred through the relational placement of tiny dots of cyan, magenta, yellow and black inks (CMYK)⁵⁷ was not the basis of the image. Rather, the image was built up through repeatedly feeding the support through the printer, printing one layer of non-standard colour at a time. To achieve this the image was broken down into greyscale screens and the black cartridge replaced with custom dyes, i.e. K =Yellow, gold, orange, vermilion, umber, violet, etc. Depending on the image the support was fed through the printer sometimes up to twenty times. The result was an image that operated in terms of light penetrating the layers of ink, reflecting back colour off the surface of the support, such as occurs with a painting constructed from semi-translucent glazes of paint. This process enriched the colour, surface, saturation, and

⁵⁶Refer to Appendix 3 for detailed description

density of the image, giving it vibrancy and luminosity unlike commercial printing processes that rely on the optical mixing of colour.⁵⁸

As the process became more familiar other avenues for extending the parameters in terms of the potential to construct images were pursued. This responded in different ways to increased freedom of expression emerging from familiarity with the process. Knowing and seeing, in terms of the process, altered patterns of thought and the shape of images in my mind - and the way this was translated or transformed into hard copy.

For example, early exploration of overprinting began with a pre-existing image that was broken down into grey-scale screens of information, and rebuilt through overprinting one layer of colour upon the next where K (the black channel) held a number of values ie. colour and saturation; in later stages this became a much more fluid and intuitive process - where the image was constructed from 'ground up' having existed in no complete form other than as output.



Fig.72
from *Leaf* series, 1997 (working prints - 2 passes, first K = vermillion, second K = violet)

This represented a significant departure from the strategies employed during the Honours investigation. The image took shape through overprinting multiple

⁵⁷CMYK refers to the process colours of the Nova Jet printers. In the process of overprinting these colours were replaced with custom dyes. As a key C,M,Y,K are used to indicate the cartridge used and its new value. E.g. K=Sienna
⁵⁸Appendix 1 provides technical information on the inks and supports used in this process. It also explains the methods developed for registration, and details how other problems relating to this methodology were overcome.

screens of information, each generated from an increasingly diverse range of screens.

Specific Works

Leaf series 1997, was the first major work completed in the investigation. The focus of its content was the urban environment of Hobart and a range of images, that had captured my attention, repeatedly experienced and documented over a period of several months. While each image was evocative in its own right, the presentation as a series evoked a sense of narrative and inter-relationship.

Evaluation of Stage 1

Such an approach increased the capacity for the medium to generate unique prints, constructed from a diverse range of source material, built up as hard copy through the process of overprinting. The end work remained, however, a scene, presenting the viewer with a limited window onto the world.

What resulted from *Leaf series* was the intention to move away from the internal narrative of individual scenes, and from the cinematic reading that resulted from presenting these as a series of closely linked images.

Leaf series was developed for a group exhibition of experimental digital prints 'Nought Plus One' at the Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart, and panels were subsequently selected in a range of prize exhibitions including the 1997 Hobart Art Prize, and the Shell Fremantle Print Prize. The body of work was also exhibited as part of the 1997 New York Digital Salon.

STAGE 2 - *Location I*, 1998

Work developed in this stage, signified a departure from earlier approaches. Methodologies for increasing the correspondence between environmental experience and the realised images were pursued. In addition, processes were now driven by response to the previous work, and a desire to simplify images; this was an attempt to overcome the knowledge the viewer brings to any images. Attention shifted to focus on exploring the construction of the image, questioning its believability, and suggesting a heightened sense of the transformative processes that operate in the environment. It seemed appropriate to make the subject more ambiguous, to hover *between* states of matter.

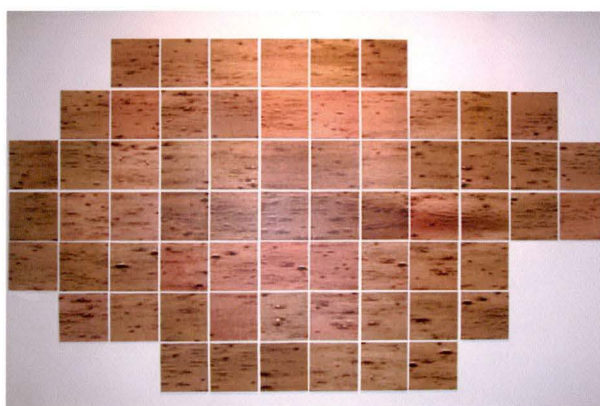


Fig.73

Troy Ruffels

Location I, 1998

Specific Works

The intention behind this work was to create a composite static image constructed from a temporal sequence of video footage, which extended the image outwards, beyond our normal line of view. A subject that had been intriguing me was chosen; the fall of rain, the forms, patterns and harmonies, resulting from tiny droplets impacting on the surface of gently undulating harbour waters. The objective was to work on component parts of a composite image, and to create a structural ambiguity relating back to this most transient and ethereal of subjects.

Following deliberation on the size and scale of each component, work began on

the image. An early resolution of formal considerations increased freedom to respond, and react, to the work as it developed.



Fig.74

Troy Ruffels

Location I, 1998

The panels chosen were 32cm x 32cm; printed in multiple passes employing the process of overprinting previously discussed. As the aim was to create a sense of spatial ambiguity, the work was limited to exploring tonal properties and subtle colour shifts across the work; this also aimed at a more coherent appearance of images, already highly abstracted and fragmented. As each print was completed it was pinned to a wall, then another frame selected and the process repeated. Over time, colour shifts and tonal relationships were employed to increasingly subtle degrees; harsh and sharp images were offset by introducing blurred and out-of-focus panels; the work began to take shape, its harmonies were composed, its peaks and troughs and colours moved around - the image emerged. The process of overprinting was immediate in the sense that decisions were made quickly, colour and saturation levels changed, and accidents exploited. There was no 'scene' no expectation. The result *Location I*, was a work composed of 70 panels, each 32cm x 32cm, in an evenly spaced grid configuration 5 panels high by 14 panels long. (Some were passed through the printer 3-4 time, others 12, the varying densities of ink created a shifting spatial plane.)

Evaluation of Stage 2

Location I was a deeply satisfying work, and significant in the context of the project. The move away from a particular scene and a predetermined image,

underpinned its importance. The increased spontaneity and experimentation employed in its production altered the approach to the process.

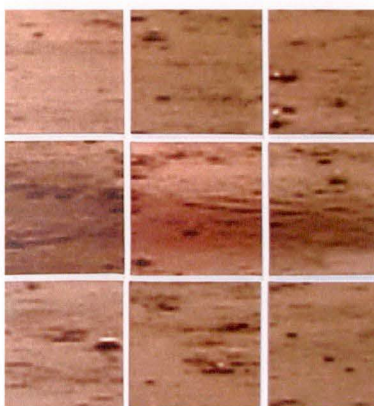


Fig.74

Troy Ruffels

Location 1, 1998 (detail)

The result was a heightened awareness of the procedures for developing imagery using a more intuitive strategy. The layering process employed increased interest in the potential for overprinting to construct images in a manner more in tune with painting. One of the attributes of the process was its capacity to attain a rich and vibrant surface. This was to form the technical basis for work pursued in stage 3.

Location 1 was developed for the group exhibition *Excursive Sight* at the Plimsoll Gallery Hobart, 1998, and was selected for inclusion in the 1998 New York Digital Salon, travelling to international venues in Spain, Portugal, the Canary Islands and Italy.

STAGE 3 - *Near Horizon* series, 1998

The concentration on the water image in *Location I* resulted in a shift in perspective. Focus was increasingly directed to the visual transformation of matter occurring below our normal line of vision. The sky, and horizon line, all but disappeared, the surface of, and appearances emanating from, the water along the Hobart harbourfront near the studio emerged as the subject. This site was passed each day. Its details and harmonies became more discernible. A rich tapestry of elements interacted, shapes emerged and dissolved in an endless cycle of transformation. Near the edges of the pier dark shadows and pools of light spilled across the semi-transparent shallows: the watery surface intermingled as reflections warped and twisted, gradually changing and moving out towards the middle and far distant bay. The movement of currents beneath the surface, the refracting and reflecting light, were obscured at times by the 'spell' of chemicals, by autumn leaves and debris that floated on the surface.

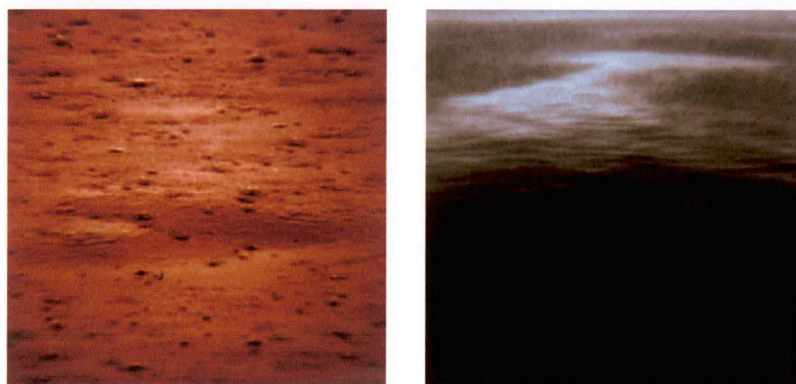


Fig. 75 and 76

Troy Ruffels

from *Near Horizon* series, 1998

Wind textured channels on the water's surface, the sudden change of direction, its peaks and troughs, created a harmony of endless variation - like following the trajectory made by a cluster of starlings. The engagement with this phenomenon seemed to slow time itself. Patterns emerged and dissolved as the wind swirled, changed direction and strength; one moment the water had the appearance of thick oil (highly reflective), then, plates of glass (semi-reflective), or a finely woven fabric in which there was no reflection.

When rain fell, tiny droplets impacted on the surface, patterns repeated across

the fluid field. These were not new observations but their resonance changeddramatically depending on the degree to which my attention focussed on them to the exclusion of other elements. In many ways life was entangled with this process of change, transformation and metamorphosis - a play of elements over which there was little control. In a fraction of a second, pools of light dramatically changed from large fractals to intricate lines. The work developed in stage 3 sought to push the process of overprinting to its limits, exploring the transformation of appearances.

Specific Works

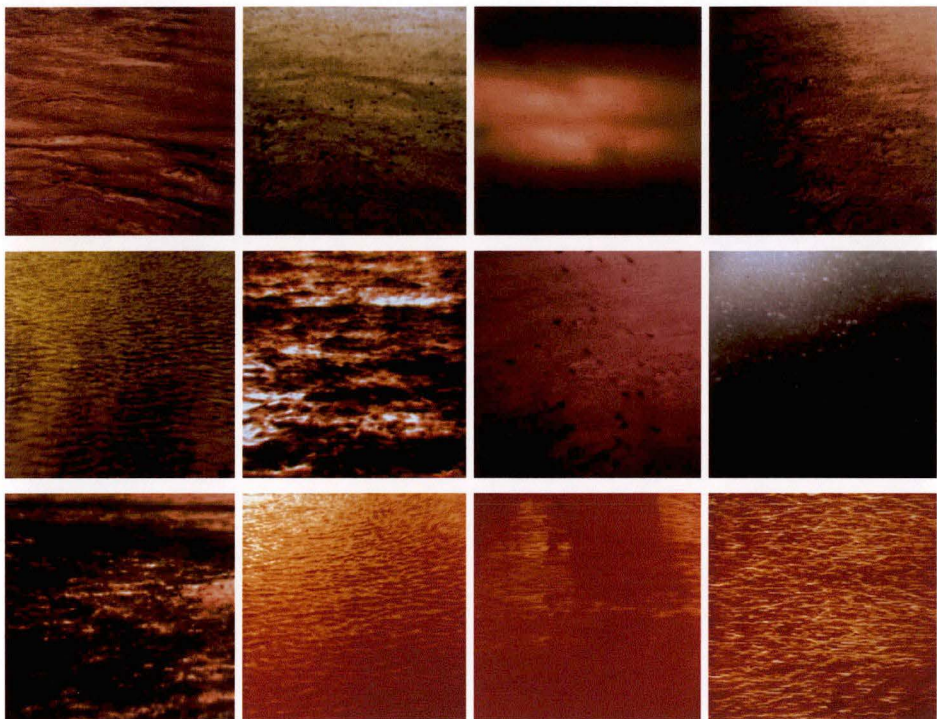


Fig.77 - 88
Troy Ruffels
from *Near Horizon* series, 1998

The content shifted to focus on the transient nature of matter and the process of transformation in appearance from one state to another. Although this had been hinted at in the individual panels of *Location I*, the composite structure of the grid brought back suggestions of a vista or scene, a panorama of space stretching horizontally along the gallery wall.

The changing patterns caused by wind and rain, light and shade in combination with the undulating creases and folds created by shifting tides and currents had long been a fascination. They were immediate and proximate vistas and their inherent ambiguity suggested the vast cosmic spaces like Vija Celmin’s nebular skylscapes, moon surfaces, and desert floors. Perspective and focus subsequently shifted to what rested beneath the shallow surface: the ground, earth and water, rather than the space ahead.



Fig. 89 and 90
Troy Ruffels
from *River* series, 1998

Monet’s studies of waterlilies and the ponds of Giverny also emerged as a relevant source. The reflection of sky, leaves and debris, and the depth of water trapped the image that hovered suspended in the shallow space between surface and the impenetrable silence of the darkness beyond. Similarly, Turner’s atmospheric studies of sky and seascapes resonated during the making of this work.

The work initiated was titled *Near Horizons*. It concentrated on the transformation of matter, and the near and far horizons of subjects of close proximity transformed into vast ethereal and atmospheric spaces. This body of work carried the overprinting procedure to its most dynamic stage. The images completed referred to fields of distortion, to the characteristics of video and to the dense fibrous weave of space.

Evaluation of Stage 3

One of the problems in overprinting was the scuffing and marking of the surface of the image by the print heads. This was a continual frustration after a number

of layers had been printed. The change in surface of the canvas supports, and the difficulties of accurate alignment, made this increasingly problematic. Such marks brought the image back to the means of its production; and this marred attaining the desired reading.

As a result of familiarity with the process of using custom dyes, and improved control over the overprinting process, strategies were developed for reducing the number of passes required to resolve an image. This was achieved through the use of custom ink sets i.e. the 4 colour printer was filled with cartridges of different colour values (K=Gold Yellow, M=Vermillion, Y=Scarlet, C=Umber). A number of other works were completed through following this set of procedures. New characteristics emerged from this process and were subsequently explored.



Fig.91

Troy Ruffels

Pavement series, 1998 (achieved by the above mentioned process)

During the course of the project, changing market demand in the commercial sector resulted in increased difficulty in accessing suitable products for these procedures. Along with added expense this hindered further exploration of the overprinting procedures. These developments were offset by the acquisition of a new printer in the Research Facility. A NovaJet Pro-50 had been purchased using ARC funding. It has been my experience that each printer offers a relatively unique set of characteristics with which to work, particularly if you are concerned with the quality of output, rather than its optical resolution and a seamless photographic appearance.

Near Horizon series was exhibited at the University of Tasmania, Fine Art

Gallery, Hobart, as part of a digital research exhibition of results in experimental media from the Digital Art Research Facility. Select prints were subsequently chosen for exhibition as part of the World Print Festival, Slovenia, and the Canon Digital Print Awards, Clocktower Museum, London. River series was exhibited at the Devonport Regional Gallery as part of a solo exhibition 'Location' in 1999.

STAGE 4 - *Reflection* works

Stage 4 saw a change in motif, and in the focus of attention. The study of phenonema on the surface of the harbour waters inevitably carried over. The patterns, images and transformations occurring on the pavements of urban streets emerged as a subject of interest. Reflective street surfaces began to fascinate, and even more, the intermingling of reflection as image with the nature of the reflective surface in which it was caught. This was to be an important motif in the work. It was both conceptually important in terms of the direction the work was following, and of personal significance. Smaller and smaller details in the environment became visible, as observation became more acute. Landscapes unfolded in uneven concrete pavements: droplets of water that sat above freshly layed tar, shadow patterns. The significance of the change from looking at reflections and patterns unfolding in water to a more direct response to the earth under our feet in the urban environment is that the subject provided a more interesting and proximate relationship to its experience. It was a more specific subject matter, the elements and changes in states more influential and, more pertinent, in creating a metaphorical language that spoke of the nature of interaction in the most common locales.

This was pursued across a range of prints. The first *Reflection I* (1998) used the Novajet III and a colour ink set to achieve controlled and subtle variation across a tertiary field. *Reflection II*, however, utilised the Novajet Pro-50 because of the vibrancy of its graphic inks, and the need to desire to achieve a range green hues that leaned towards an artificial hue. *Reflection III* returned to the Novajet III, with a different colour set.

Specific Works

Reflections present us with windows through which to view the world. Small pools of water, surfaced as a key subject. In these tiny pools and puddles, there was a heightened sense of uncertainty - as leaves and debris floated near the surface, changing the form and shape of a reflected image that came into focus only briefly in passing. For a moment, when approached from a certain angle, an image revealed itself, before slipping back into the reflective material. This glimpse of an ephemeral world fascinated me, and was closely aligned to the subject of the work - the close, the familiar, the proximate. Autumn branches stretched out across the pool of water, reflecting a world above while focus was directed to what lay on the urban ground floor. Ambiguities that surfaced and were explored in *Near Horizon* series also existed here, the subject existing in a perpetual state of transformation. It presented a dual reality - the world as matter - and the appearance of the world as reflected in the mirror surface.

Each of these works attempted to convey a different aspect of the experience. *Reflection I* reconstructed the image from multiple photographs of the subject over a period of months.

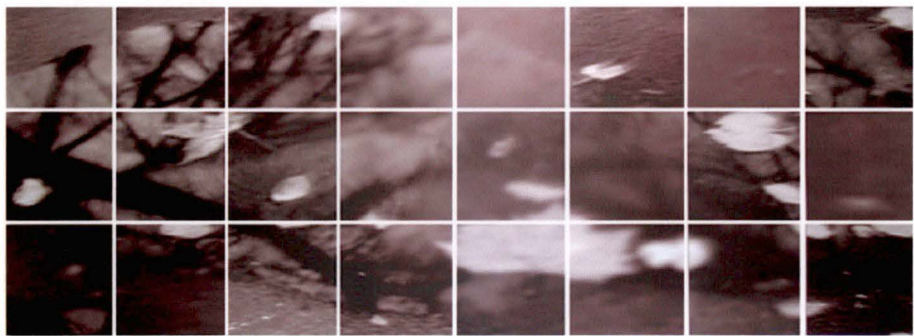


Fig.92
Troy Ruffels
Reflection I, 1998

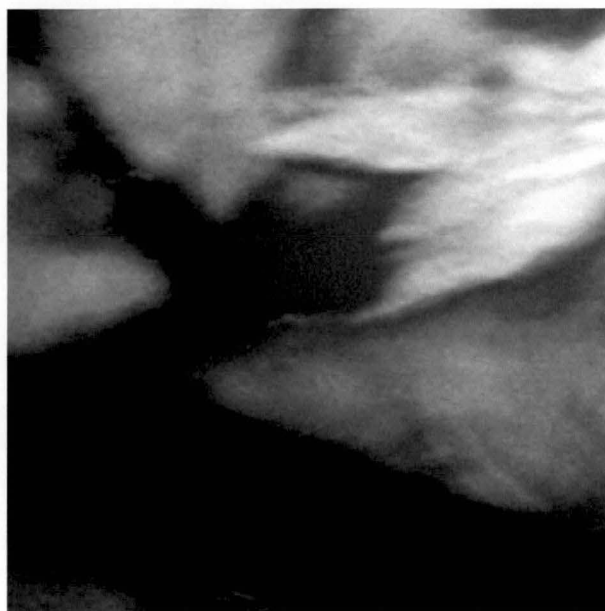


Fig.93
Troy Ruffels
Reflection I, 1998 (detail)

Interest increased in the capacity of work, presented as a grid, to suggest the elements of time and the multi-dimensional nature of space. The spaces between panels also allowed for a greater diversity. Separation by a few centimetres allowed a leap of imagination to occur - the image was perceived as continuous and singular, even though ruptures occurred in both the subject and the formal devices employed to create spatial ambiguity within the work. It was pieced together from video stills and fragments of photographs collected over a period of time. It comprised different angles; different speeds of my passing the spot; and footage collected on different day

Reflection II, was generated by video footage in passing by a reflective pool.

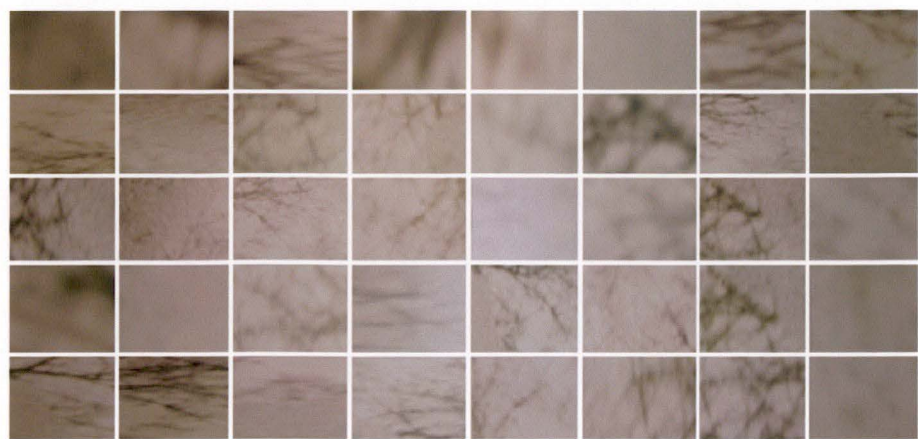


Fig.94
Troy Ruffels
Reflection II, 1999

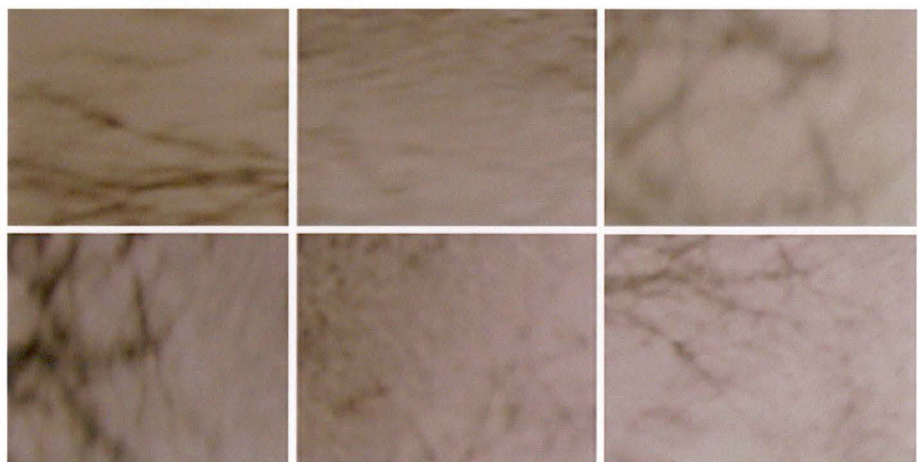


Fig.95
Troy Ruffels
Reflection II, 1999 (detail)

Reflection III, attempted to flatten out the space, and create uncertainty as to where the image began and ended.

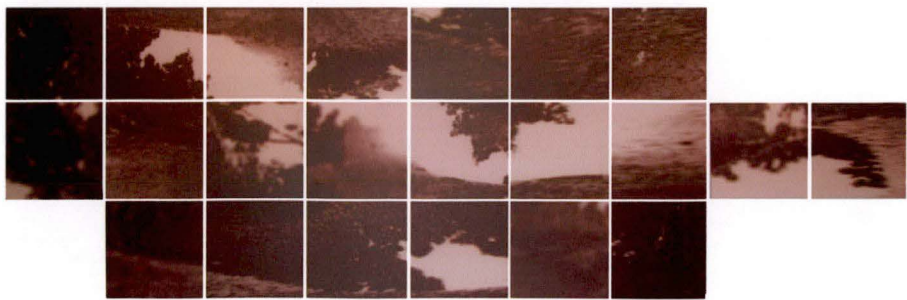


Fig.96
Troy Ruffels
Reflection III, 1999



Fig.97
Troy Ruffels
Reflection III, 1999 (detail)

Evaluation of Stage 4

Incorporating movement into the image by composing it from a range of perspectives, together with the ambiguity resulting from the intermix of ground and image, photography and video, enhanced the ability to create an image that both relied on, and exploited, the viewer's pre-knowledge for its reading. The subtle use of tone and the specific colour choices softened the work - increasing its capacity to suggest recall.

Reflection I, II, and III were exhibited in a range of exhibitions. These included solo exhibitions in Devonport and Madrid, group exhibitions at CAST Gallery, Hobart, and a range of prize and award exhibitions including selection in the 1999 New York Digital Salon, International Travelling exhibition.

STAGE 5 - *Breach* series 1999

It was frequently necessary during the project to revisit past strategies with the increased knowledge of process that I had arrived at through other works. An example of this occurred early in 1999, when I revisited a narrative-based organisation of images similar in presentation to *Leaf series*.

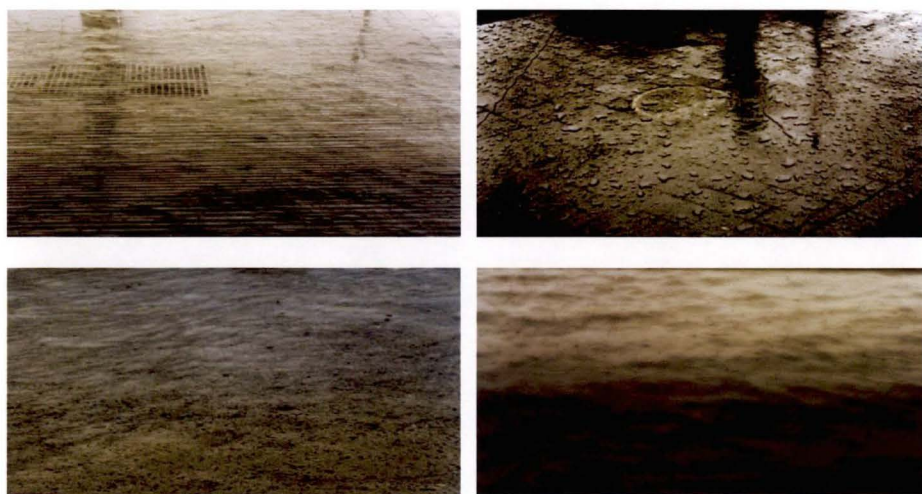


Fig.98-101

Troy Ruffels

from *Breach* series, 1999

Specific Works

Breach series 1999 was the result of a period of heavy rainfall and harsh weather conditions that occurred over a period of a month in Hobart in 1999. Earlier work had looked at images reflected in pools of water, but had ignored the transformation undergone by street gutters and pavements during heavy rain. This subject has persisted to be personally important - how could the previous layering techniques for creating composite images be used to distil a sense of this change and transformation under such active conditions? The work that resulted was a series of 8 images. The intention was to create a breach, as the title suggests, between world and image and to reveal the space it created in the imagination.

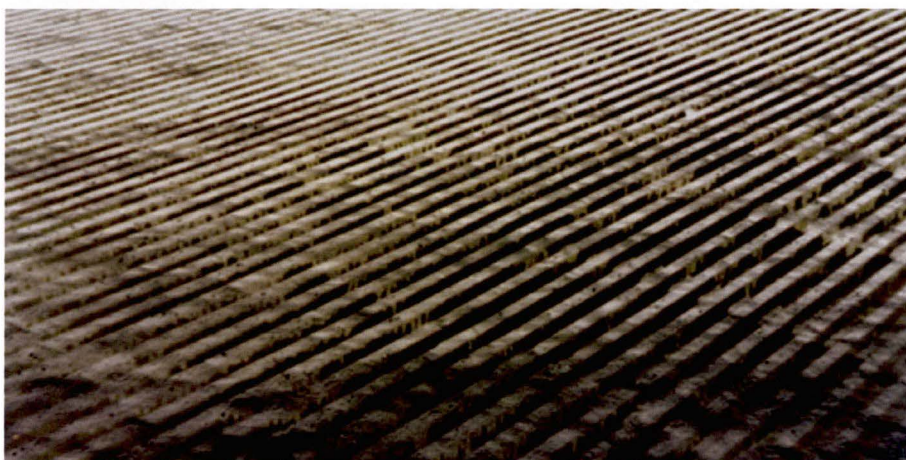


Fig.98-101

Troy Ruffels

from *Breach* series, 1999 (reworked 2002)

Evaluation of Stage 5

Working again with a series of images that related to individual subjects caused a number of problems, and reinforced an interest in composite imagery in which a work was constructed from aspects of a single subject. The series of inter-related, but isolated, imagery shifted the reading of the work back to another kind of narrative and metaphoric relationship. *Breach* series reaffirmed my commitment to composite works where internal narratives were created by manipulating the pictorial field to create tensions and uncertainties beyond those attainable through a narrative-based reading; one where fractals and fragments of images merged and fused in the imagination.

Breach Series was exhibited as part of the solo exhibition at the Devonport Regional Gallery. A re-worked image was selected for inclusion in the 2002 Fremantle Art Prize.

STAGE 6 - *Location III*, 2000

The work that evolved from stage 6 was the most ambitious embarked upon during the project. It was based upon a short 3-minute video sequence capturing the harbour waters under light rain, on an overcast day, where the wind and currents caused endless variable rhythms across and within the body of water.

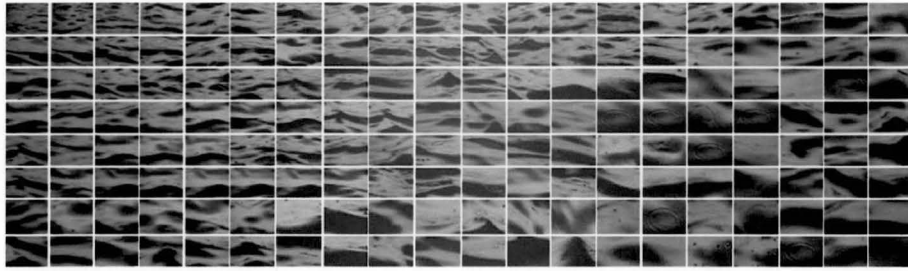


Fig.102

Troy Ruffels

Location III, 2000 (Installation)

Specific Works

The method of serialising images, employed in works like *Location III* is aimed at removing the edge from the work. Like fractals, the forms repeat and extend out from themselves, endlessly unique, yet, all the same. It aimed to suggest an eternal narrative of silence, an eternal pool of collective memory, situated in the landscape. The work is about the presence of memory, memory that exists parallel to us in the present. It is an ephemeral world, transient and mysterious, of subjects that are not remote, but which we have all experienced, at a glance or a glimpse in passing.

The work was generated by video footage. A hand-held video camera was directed towards the undulating surface of the harbour waters under a light fall of rain; zooming in from the outermost point to the furthestmost magnification, moving slowly to the rhythms of the ocean. The work that resulted followed a

general plan of selecting 1 frame for every second of the zoom (which was carried out over 3 minutes), and then composing them into a large grid. The panels were structured around the linear sequence. However, the final form of the work reorganised the space so that panels were out of sequence, creating an internal harmonic structure.

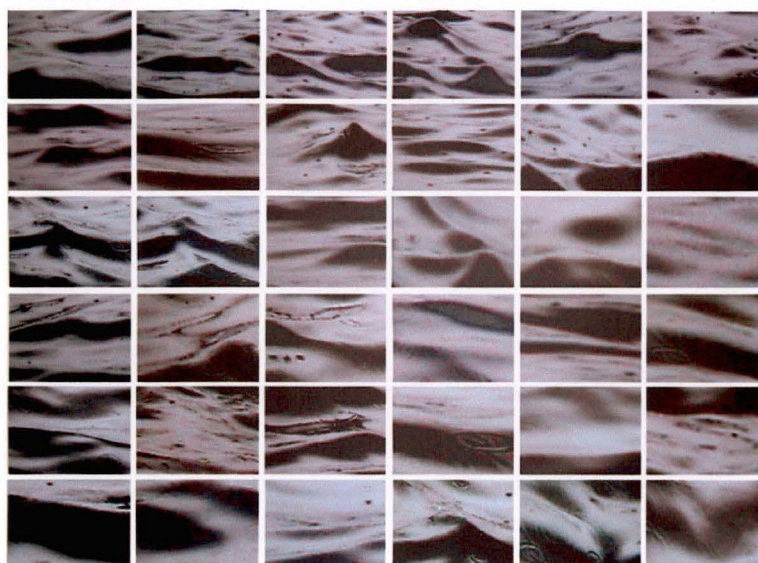


Fig.103

Troy Ruffels

Location III, 2000 (detail)

The intention was for the work to suggest a self-perpetuating momentum, as though, if not contained or restricted by the gallery space, it could unfold endlessly; working around the idea of a multi-tiered space, comprised of several layers. From a distance, the work evoked a unified scene broken down into a grid. On closer inspection it revealed myriad forms and a disjointed linear sequence - broken and reorganised around an internal structure or opposing rhythm. Video characteristics sharply contrasted with softly blurred panels. Magenta and green video distortions ruptured the seemingly tonal space. All these internal structures coalesced to create a symphony of form and harmony more like a musical score. It was both an expansive vista and a small microcosm of the world, and referred to both internal and external dramas.

Evaluation of Stage 6

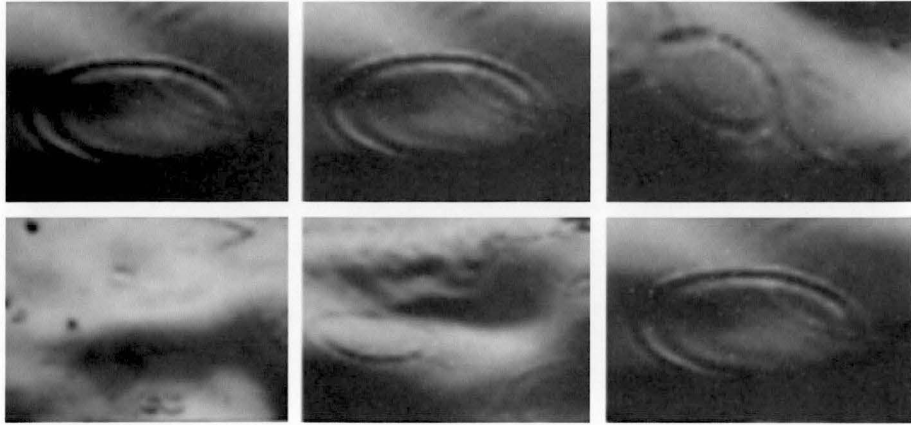


Fig.104

Troy Ruffels

Location III, 2000 (detail)

Location III was a deeply satisfying work. The component elements of the work operated together to create a sense of harmony and rhythm, while also conjuring a range of other readings. The soft focus panels, alongside more obvious 'video' selections where the image broke down into coarse video grain, and its interpretation by printing hardware, created a restless and varying surface.

Location III was exhibited as part of the solo exhibition 'Hood' at CAST Gallery, Hobart. It has also included in 'Ten Days on the Island', Long Gallery, Hobart, 2001.

STAGE 7 - Hood series, 2000-2002/ Bonnet I, 2000

The *Hood* series arrived at a new metaphorical motif, while maintaining its central focus on the urban locale. Caught in the shiny duco of cars parked around Hobart's Constitution Dock, moments of time dissolve and warp. Like mirages, shadows of bare trees eerily slip across watery pastel colours, torn clouds thread through wintry skies and raindrops are held in suspense on silvery surfaces.

Two series of work were completed based around this theme. *Hood* series, and *Bonnet I*. Each work represented a different approach to the qualities of the subject.



Fig.105 -112
Troy Ruffels
from Hood series, 2000

The quality of the surface, in terms of its capacity to alter the nature of the image, and provide a varying range of characteristics depending on lighting and atmospheric conditions increased the ability of the image to convey a range of emotive qualities. The sweep of dissolving imagery and depth of colour evokes an experiential response to this idiosyncratic depiction of the landscape; glimpses of beauty embedded in banal aspects of our tangible and temporal reality.



Fig.113 - 120
Troy Ruffels
from Hood series, 2000

The surface itself was suitable for bringing together the qualities previously explored across a range of subject matter, while creating a ground that was

continuous, allowing for a coherent reading of the work. This created an interplay between the subtle characteristics of photography and painting, blurring the boundaries of appearance and creating a hybrid image that evoked qualities related to both media. This was enhanced by a different approach to the use of colour. It became more prominent in the work. There was a direct correspondence between the colour of the car bonnet and the play of light and image on the reflective enamel surface. It was the most successful of the works in creating a hybrid image and in achieving ambiguity between painting and photography.



Fig. 121 - 124
Troy Ruffels
from Hood series, 2000

The source imagery was generated by photographs and video footage of car bonnets parked around the city streets. It began as an extension of the *Reflection* works. In passing, attention was directed to images of sky and land and organic forms - branches and leaves and sky - momentarily suspended in the tough plastic surface but developed to signify a major shift in my perception of the environment.

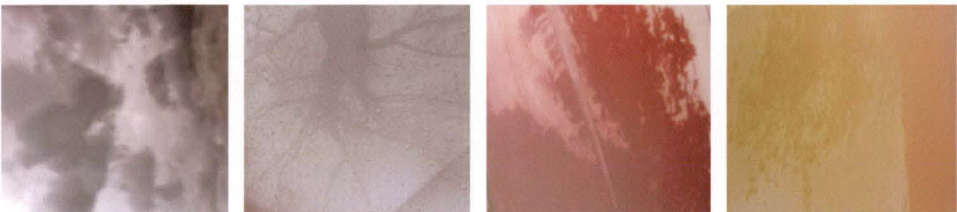


Fig. 125 - 128
Troy Ruffels
from Hood series, 2000

The image operated on two levels; like the pools of water, the surface shaped the images. And another layer was added by the polished enamel, corroded metallic surface, and the leaves and debris or frost that had settled there. The image was obscured but, at the same time, the interplay created an in-between space, where it hovered between the illusory and the actual surface of the

car hood.



Fig. 129 and 130
Troy Ruffels
from Hood series, 2000

During 2000 the Digital Art Research Facility acquired a six colour, pigment based, Roland HiFi-Jet printer. Hood series was printed using this. The pigmented inks and the 6-colour process dramatically increased the range of attainable colour, while the printer also had an overprint function built into its software. Although this did not allow the control or flexibility of the overprinting process employed earlier in the project, it did allow for a higher density of ink to be applied to the support, increasing colour depth and saturation. In particular I was interested in the range of its colour gamut, and its capability in creating softer pastel hues. - This range of colour was used to soften the bonnet images, removing them from the hard metallic surface that generated the reflection.

Bonnet I, 2000

Colour and pattern were considered in the development of the *Bonnet* works. This was inspired by some of the test prints for the *Hood* images, and by the range of soft colours the printer was able to generate.

Atmospheric changes revealed themselves in the gleaming enamel surface, but were static fixtures of the environment. The cars were parked, and whether for minutes or hours the vehicle remained stationary. By accident, I captured a car pulling out, its movement changed the reflection as the car shifted angle in a

slow reversal out from the area. This allowed the opportunity to again explore a composite grid from the subjects most recently explored. *Bonnet 1* was the work that evolved from this transient occurrence. Again, I approached it thinking of how Turner or Monet might deal with such a vista, and of how to create an image more evocative of the atmospheric play that reflected the change in light and gave rise to a feeling of ambience in the final work. It was like an impression of sunrise, the sun bleached forms washed over the hood and side panels of the car as it moved away.

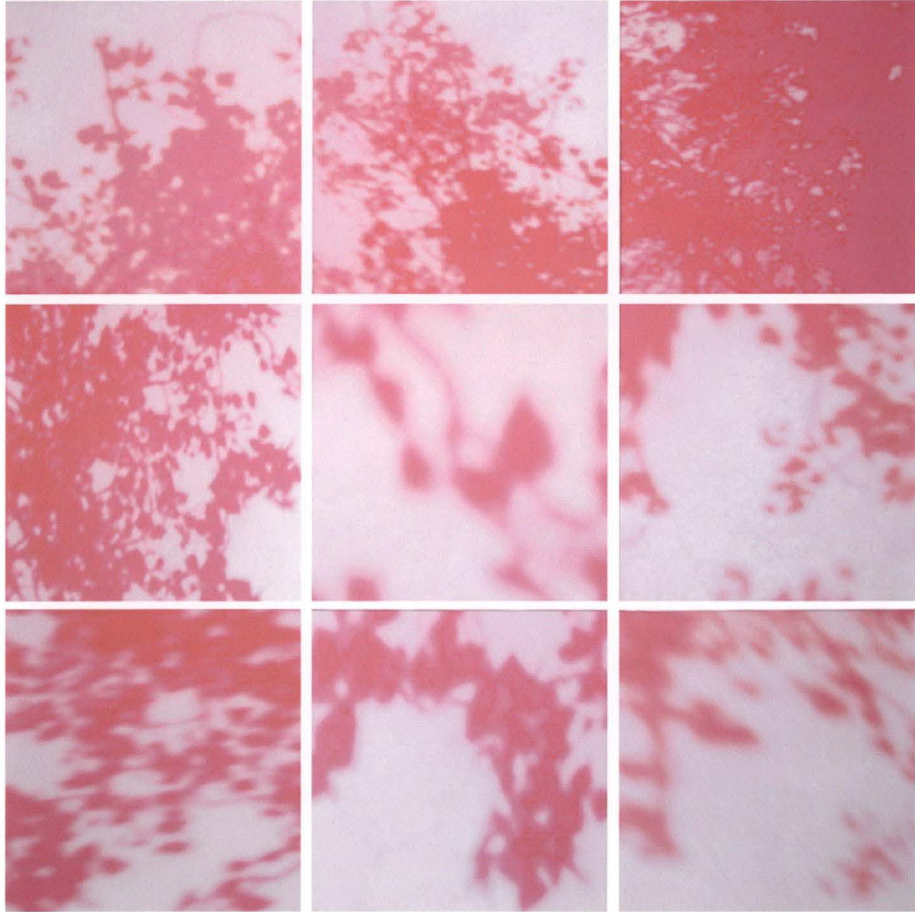


Fig. 131
Troy Ruffels
Bonnet 1, 2000

This was also the most deliberate use of colour. The image was reduced to two hues, pink and orange. All other colours were selectively replaced. The optical play of these colours in close proximity created an interesting effect. They vibrated off each other - creating both an optical dazzle *and* flatness - confusing the nature of the space.



Fig. 131
Troy Ruffels
Bonnet I, 2000 (detail)

Evaluation of Stage 7

The solo exhibition *Hood* at the CAST Gallery, Hobart, 2000, represented the summation of the studio investigation. In terms of the project a number of works demonstrated the merging of appearances between photography and printmaking, and moreso, between photography and painting. The exhibition was based on a large amount of experimental work, which was not part of the exhibition. The exhibition comprised of *Hood* series, *Bonnet I*, and *Location III* (variation - reworked after its initial installation), and brought together the range of concerns I had been exploring. The emergence of the motif of the car bonnet, as a surface through which to view the ephemeral forces of nature was significant. In a way, I saw it like Monet's ponds at Giverny; a transient surface, capturing the play of light and interaction of pictorial elements. It brought together the ambiguities between the reflective surface and the image, heightened by its porous translation into soft and muted representations. The images were multi layered; bringing together the image as reflected in a range

of duco surfaces (ranging from highly finished enamel, of new cars, to the worn and rusted hulls of older weather beaten models; integrated surface activity above the 'image', leaves and frost and debris that fell from overhanging trees; and incorporated changes of light and weather, from a light drizzles of rain to the bleaching rays of sunlight. My movement through this environment and the use of the camera and video camera to capture fleeting images also responded to the transient nature of the subject. Rarely, would the same car be parked in the same place the next day, so the moment became increasingly important.

SECTION 6

CONCLUSION

Outcomes and Significance

1) In seeking a subjective response to Place it was apparent that subjectivity by nature is something we cannot repress. This project however, set out to express the emotive qualities of subjectivity celebrated in the mind at certain times in response to familiar places.

In visual art such idiosyncratic feelings have usually been associated with the spontaneous application of oil paint directly onto canvas; a process unencumbered by a sequence of systematic technological procedures. Certainly lens-captured images and, as it turned out, video frames in particular, have the capacity to document the moment in the field and to accomplish this with almost no interruption to our communion with place.

In itself documentation, a visual record of events, has strong objective connotations. Its perceived position is well outside the realm of poetics that was the framework for this project. So the project set out to find a convergent methodology designed to bring together the idiom of Painting and a group of New Media technologies.

The methodology is described step by step in the body of the exegesis.

2) Central to the success of this synthesis between painting and photography has been the methodology for approaching the environment.

This has been strongly influenced by the writings of Barry Lopez and Annie Dillard and consequently they have been freely quoted in the exegesis. The important issue here is not one particular position however but the desire to find visual form for subjective feelings in response to place.

3) During this project the knowledge which came from revisiting sites a number of times was essential. The repeated visits gave a more profound layer of understanding and revealed things previously unheeded. In association with this was the desire for fresh insights into the world. This grew rather than diminished

with increased knowledge. As the identity of objects became less important their role in the visual patterning of the area became apparent.

4) As the project proceeded a strong preference developed for temporal (video camera) means of recording experience. It allowed unimpeded movement within the site. Essentially it recorded my physical responses. The editing process was separate from the site visit. Also the sequential images were useful in developing multi-image pieces. On the whole video images were less defined than those from a still camera and the softer definition was sympathetic to the subsequent manipulation in the computer and increased the scope for composite metaphoric representation.

5) Some weeks could, and in practice did, elapse between the first overshooting of images in the field to the final production of the digital print. The time lag raised the question of spontaneity. There was a practical need to find space for reflection and evaluation. After the initial shoot, spontaneity was a quality evident in some images; it became an issue of selection and then of retention during the following processes. Apparent evidence of spontaneity (appearance of immediacy) related to clarity of purpose and the elimination of non-essentials; and perhaps carried the element of surprise.

6) Arising from the experiments with repeated over-printing using semi-transparent inks, a range of canvas supports were selected for use. Canvas was more robust than paper and less inclined to distort during the layering of inks. In the latter stages of the project the 'tooth' visible in the canvas helped to distance the work from a normal 'photo look' and that ambiguity was beneficial to the project's convergent agenda.

7) Multiple images became a major strategy in resolving the project. Environments gain their character from quite complex interacting components: harmonies, contrasts, and discords. It became a matter of determining the features rather than attempting to be comprehensive and yet encompassing crucial interplay between elements was a way of revealing important truths.

So while the pieces have been conceived as single entities most were composed of a series of images. A video 'take' produces numerous frames, which denote both time and movement. However one of the parameters of the research project

is the still image, the artwork to be contemplated. Video takes provided a range of source material in terms of lifted single frames and not as actual sequences.

Generally large-scale images were used because the gallery vista was more likely to encompass the viewer's field of vision in the gallery. They allow for total visual absorption. The large size permits the viewer to wander through the artwork, pausing and discovering in ways not dissimilar to my contact with place.

8) The examination exhibition displaying works representative of the main stages of the studio-based investigation provides evidence of the direct outcomes of the research. While this exegesis discusses the project's aims, attitude, means and procedures, each of these was initially developed and ultimately is manifest in visual image form.

APPENDIX 1

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Since returning from Glasgow a number of areas are already generating images for future work. These include a continued exploration of city spaces, and heightened concentration on urban peripheries.

New work has responded to the peripheries of the urban environment, to inhabiting the Queen's Domain Woodland Reserve near to where I live, to working with native trees and grasslands, and the unique habitat that exists on the cities fringes.

A new range of materials is also being considered for use. Some of these include printing onto metal surface, and the use of anodised aluminium.

APPENDIX 2

Digital Art Research Facility

Much of the research project was carried out in association with, and with the assistance of, the Digital Art research Facility at the Tasmanian School of Art at Hobart.

Formed in early 1996 DARF is a research unit of the Tasmanian School of Art at Hobart, a department of the University of Tasmania. DARF has as its mission to:

Develop and conduct research programs in the exploration and application of digital technology to the Visual Arts, and in so doing develop research training opportunities and methodologies.

Currently the major focuses of research activities of DARF are upon exploring and extending the potential of digital imaging and the digital print.

The project with particular relevance to my investigation was

The application of traditional painting and print-making layering techniques to digital printing technologies.

Summary: This project will develop methodologies for the adaptation of existing computer printing hardware and software to accommodate the traditional techniques of ink and pigment layering used in the fine art disciplines of Painting and Print-making. A new printing system will be developed to provide accurate registration in multi-layered printing, and to expand the range and flexibility of materials used in the process. The project will have direct application for the commercial development of archival quality papers and flexible printing systems for use with digital imaging systems.

DARF was comprised of several members who interacted in the studio sharing ideas and discoveries. The research environment saw a number of artists taking different approaches to the digital print medium in innovative and exciting ways. The diverse range of backgrounds and individual approaches to the medium highlighted the immense potential of digital print processes and imaging strategies to extend the parameters of

print media in fine art. It proved to be a critical component of the development of work in this project and offered access to equipment vital to exploring the projects goals which, required a hands on knowledge of printing processes and variables, not offered by commercially out-sourcing the production of work.

Members of DARF include: Geoff Parr, Bill Hart, Mary Scott, Milan Milojevic, Pat Brassington, Sarah Ryan, and Brigita Ozolins.

APPENDIX 3

Developing a methodology for overprinting using large format inkjet printers - technical information

A procedure was developed, for overprinting using transparent dye-based inks and various supports for the attainment of a vibrant image surface.

This procedure involved printing layers of an image, one upon the other, sometimes up to 20 times. In developing this procedure a methodology for constructing and breaking down images into appropriate stages for achieving a composite image was developed.

A range of inks and supports were identified as suitable for this process. The criterion upon which selection was made was determined by their compatibility with the Encad III, large format printer.

Before any other factors could be considered, the printer needed to function properly and corrosion of the print head and ink cartridges (HP 51626A cartridge) had to be kept to a minimum in order to make the process viable. A range of transparent dyes and opaque inks were trialed with varying degrees of success.

The most suitable inks were found to be (Elbsolie) Silk Dyes. These were available in a wide range of colours and were compatible with the printer. After substantive testing, these inks, were also found to be the most suitable for overprinting - stability of colour and side affects from overprinting were minimal. Pigments tended to clog the cartridges.

A range of supports ranging from paper to canvas, including material designed specifically for use with the printer, and those, like print-making papers, intended for other use, were trialed. Because the process of overprinting often required large amounts of ink to be applied to the

surface of the support, and there was a need for accurate registration, those supports that warped or curled, or became saturated with ink were eliminated. Ranges of suitable supports were identified. The most effective was an artist grade 8oz canvas from OCE Australia Pty Ltd.

The process of overprinting was highly intuitive. It was a visual knowledge-based process that increased with application. Through continually employing the procedures and through experimentation, knowledge emerged where ideas occurred about what was effective, and about what result might be expected to be achieved.

Conclusions arising from experimentation

Problems

- finding a reliable supply of materials
- the cost and degrading ink cartridges
- the difficulties involved with accurate registration
- the scuffing of print heads
- the archival nature of materials

Successes

- the most important outcomes were the increased colour saturation and richness of surface; together with greater confidence in continuing to develop the processes.

APPENDIX 5

*(painting)*2000

From 1998-2000 Sarah Ryan¹ and I developed and curated an exhibition titled, *(painting)*, for the Plimsoll Gallery. *(painting)* explored the resurgence of painting within contemporary art. The exhibition proposed that the revival of interest in the medium was influenced by an appraisal of the contribution that new imaging technologies had exerted on image-making's vocabulary. The significance of the exhibition was that the curatorial premise was more deeply engaged in an understanding of how digital technology had informed the mark making vocabulary of painting as a traditional-based medium, rather than pursuing digital technology's promise as a separate medium.

In 1998 Sarah and I developed the premise for the exhibition and received Exhibition Development Funding from Contemporary Art Services Tasmania (CAST). During 1999 we travelled to Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne to source artists for the exhibition. *(painting)* opened at the Plimsoll Gallery in May 2000, and toured over two years to several venues interstate. Developing *(painting)* was an exciting opportunity for me to experience and explore curating as an avenue within my art practice. While this curatorial project was a tangent to the research project, it is indicative of other pursuits that I have explored within my research degree.

(painting)

Curated by Troy Ruffels and Sarah Ryan, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart, 2000

Artists: David Jolly, Megan Keating, Richard Muldoon, David Ralph, Megan Walch, Richard Wastell and Jemima Wyman.

Below is a selection of work exhibited in *(painting)*

¹ fellow PhD candidate



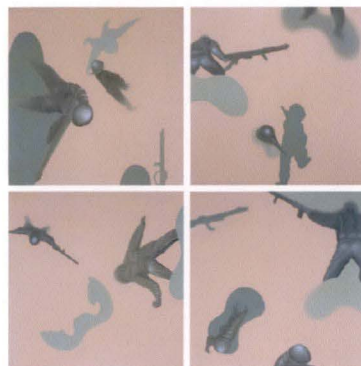
David Jolly
Landscape I 1999
Oil on glass
56 x 38 cm



David Jolly
Landscape II 1999
Oil on glass
56 x 38 cm



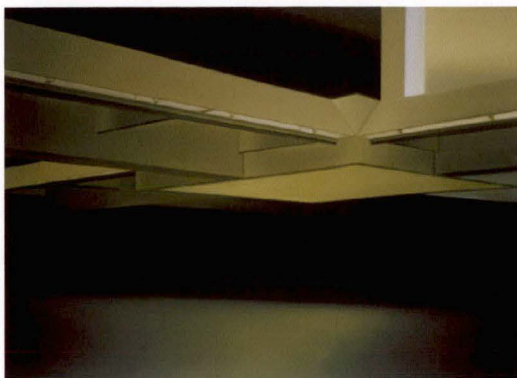
David Jolly
Lyndal 1998
Oil on glass
56 x 38 cm



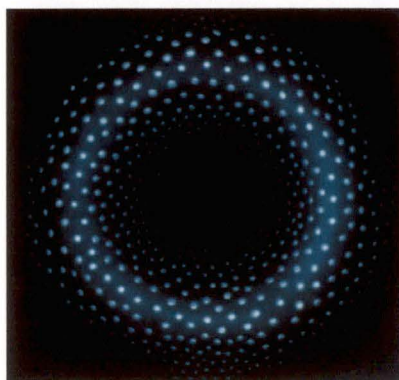
Megan Keating
The Purgatorial Perspective: from utopia to dystopia (detail) 2000
Oil and wax on canvas
12 panels each 85 x 85 cm



Richard Muldoon
Circular Highlights 1998
Oil on canvas
183 x 122 cm



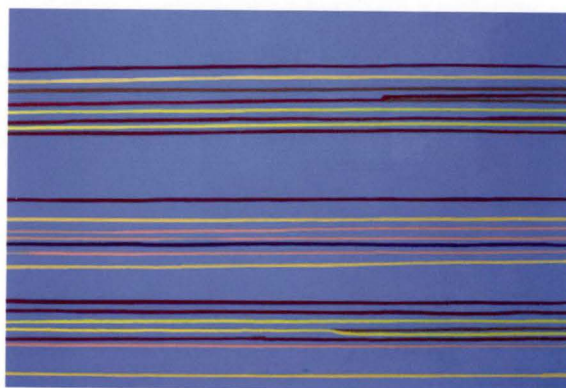
David Ralph
Canopy 2000
Oil on canvas
114 x 167 cm



Megan Walch
Alias 1 1998
Oil on canvas
127.3 x 139.5 cm



Richard Wastell
Untitled No. 1 2000
Oil on canvas
91 x 76 cm



Jemima Wyman
Blue (detail) 1998
Acrylic and ink on canvas
200 x 300 cm

APPENDIX 6

Public Art Commissions

During 2002 I have been involved in a number of commissioned works as part of the Arts for Public Buildings Scheme in Tasmania. These are located at Reece High School, and Norwood Primary School, both on the North West coast of Tasmania. The work produced has responded to aspects of place, and employed strategies developed by this project in response to place.

I researched and identified a range of processes suitable for external application, and have been surprised at the quality and characteristics of the available media. In producing the works I have used an anodised aluminium process, and am excited to explore further the potential of this medium in studio practice.

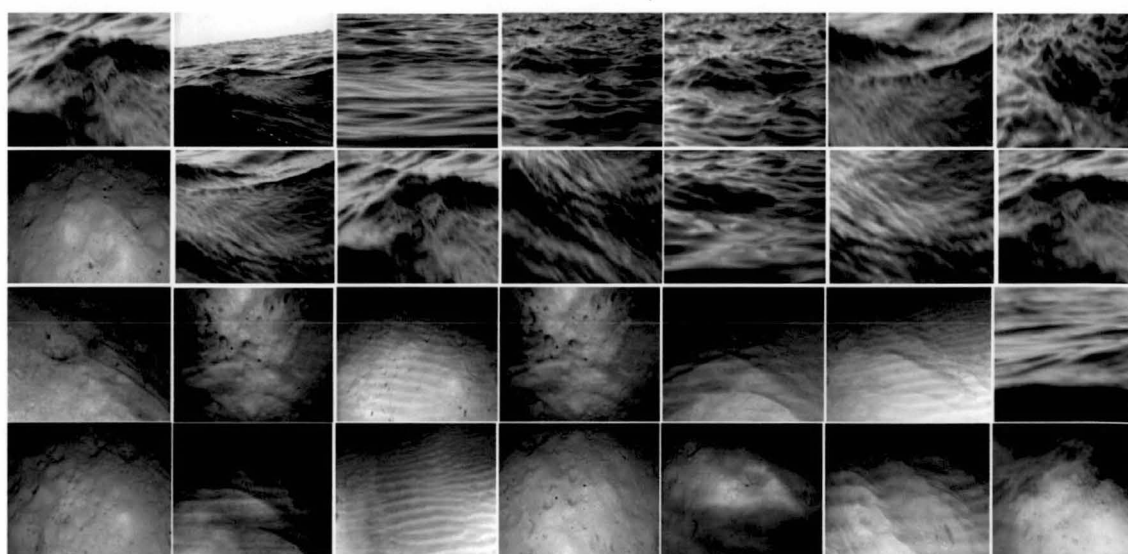
The final works are not yet complete, however, sample plates are available in the studio.

APPENDIX 7

CSIRO - Art/Science Collaboration

In 2002 I began an art/science collaboration with Alan Williams, a Benthic Ecologist at the CSIRO, as part of *Science in Salamanca*. Alan worked as part of a team that is mapping the underwater landscape using an array of imaging applications. I was particularly fascinated by the use of remote video.

I was struck when looking at the video footage provided by Alan, by the way the panning unfolded as the underwater camera rapidly scanned the ocean floor. A foreign landscape emerged and dissolved as the craft's alien lights passed over what was, for me, an unfamiliar terrain. Fine debris and tiny filaments of life floated by, carried in and out of the light on the currents; a slow sideward drift of rain or sleet; or a picture of how you imagine the night wind carries dust, pollen, or tiny insects.



Troy Ruffels
Remote Terrain: Light and Echo 2002
 Anodised Aluminium plates
 110cm x 220cm

Images and forms came in and out of focus - revealing a diverse range of matter and organic life, a rich tapestry of colour and pattern, intricate sedimentary trails, transparent glass-like pants, delicate webs, and immense breaches in the ocean floor.

I was interested in representing this diversity of form, and in reflecting the sensation of movement to suggest the rhythm and continuity of cyclical processes to which we are all inevitably tied. It was an attempt to bring an unfamiliar terrain into the realm of metaphor and imagination.

APPENDIX 8

List of Illustrations

Measurements in (cm) and height by width, unless otherwise stated.

All works by the artist unless otherwise stated.

Fig.1

Remembering the Sun, 1996

Inkjet prints on canvas

300 x 1000

Fig.2

from *Hood* series 2000

Inkjet prints on canvas

each panel 83 x 90

Fig.3 - 11

Journal images, 2002

Fig.12

Claude Monet

Oil on canvas

Waterlilies (The Clouds), 1903

74.6 x 105.3

Fig.16 -23

Journal images, 2002

Fig. 24

Caspar David Friedrich

Monk by the Sea, 1809-10

Oil on canvas

110 x 172

Fig.25, 26

Views of Hobart, Tasman Bridge, Constitution Dock

Fig.27 Caspar David Friedrich

Wanderer above the Sea of Fog, 1818

Oil on canvas

95 x 75

Fig.28

Location III (Detail) 2000

Inkjet prints on canvas

each 25 x 35

Fig. 29,30 and 31

from *Hood* series 2000

Inkjet prints on canvas

each panel 83 x 90

Fig.32

Bonnet 1 2000

Inkjet prints on canvas

200 x 200

Fig.33

William Turner

Landscape with Distant River and Bay, 1835

Oil on canvas

94 x 123

Fig.34

Claude Monet

Branch of the Seine near Giverny (Mist), 1897

Oil on canvas

89.9 x 92.7

Fig.35

Gerhard Richter

Seestück (Seascape) (376), 1975

Oil on canvas

200 x 300

Fig.36 and 37

Gerhard Richter

Seascape (Sea-Sea) [Seestücky (See-See)] 1970

Oil on canvas

174 x 174

Seestück (Seascape) 1998

Oil on canvas

290 x 290

Fig.38

Alice Stepanek and Steven Maslin

geen uitleen of verkoop Afmetingen, 1998

Oil on canvas

100 x 150

Fig. 39 and 40

Alice Stepanek and Steven Maslin

geen uitleen of verkoop Afmetingen, 1998

Oil on canvas

100 x 150

Fig.41,42 and 43

Nicky Hodge

Flowerbed series, 2000

Oil on board

12.8 x 17.6

Fig. 44,45 and 46

Vija Celmins

Untitled (large desert drawing) 1974-75

Graphite on paper

19 x 24.5 inches

Untitled 8

1995-96

charcoal on paper

16 5/6 x 21 7/8 inches

Ocean Surfaces 2000

wood engraving on Zerkall paper

20 3/4 x 17 1/4 inches

Fig.47 and 48

Vija Celmins

Web 2 and *Web 1*, 2000

mezzotint on Hahnemuhle Copperplate

18 x 14 3/4 inches

Fig.49 and 50

Roni Horn

You are the Weather, 1994-95 (Detail)

100 photographs and silver gelatin prints installed on four walls

each 25.5 x 20.5

Fig.51

Jean-Luc Mylayne

No C4 Juillet Août, 1982

C-type print

128 x 128

Fig. 52

Andreas Gursky

Rhine, 1996

Colour photograph

186 x 222

Fig. 53

Andreas Gursky

Chicago Board of Trade II, 1999

C-type print

207 x 336.8

Fig.54 and 55

Wolfgang Tillmans

Untitled (La Gomera), 1997

C-type print

61 x 51

Concorde L449-6, 1997

C-type print

33 x 24

Fig.56

Olafur Eliasson

Your natural denudation inverted, 1999 (installation view)

Fig.57

Location I I, 1998

Inkjet print on canvas

25 x 35

Fig. 58,59

Reflection study, 1999, *Icepond study*, 2002

Inkjet prints on canvas

each 68 x 68

Fig.60

from *Breach* series, 1998

Inkjet prints on canvas

each 78 x 226

Fig.61

from *Breach* series, 1999

Inkjet prints on canvas

78 x 226

Fig.62

from *Leaf* series, 1997

Inkjet prints on canvas

each 80 x 240

Fig.63

from *Near Horizon* series, 1998

Inkjet prints on canvas

each 80 x 80

Fig.64

Branch study, 1999

Inkjet prints on paper

20 x 35

Fig.65

Reflection II (detail), 1999

Inkjet prints on canvas

each panel 54 x 72

Fig.66

Reflection II, 1999

Inkjet prints on canvas

300 x 1000

Fig.67

Location I, 1998

Inkjet prints on canvas

200 x 520

Fig.68

Digital Art Research facility

A0 Encad Novajet III - during overprinting 1997

Fig.69

from *Leaf* series, 1997

Inkjet prints on canvas

each 80 x 240

Fig.70

Leaf series, 1997 (Installation)

2m x 14m

Fig.71

from *Leaf* series, 1997

Inkjet prints on canvas

each 80 x 240

Fig.72

from *Leaf* series, 1997 (working prints - 2 passes, first K = vermillion, second K = violet)

Fig.73

Location I, 1998

Inkjet prints on canvas

70 panels, each 32 x 32

Fig.74

Location I, 1998

Inkjet prints on canvas

70 panels, each 32 x 32

Fig.75 - 88

from *Near Horizon* series, 1998

Inkjet prints on canvas

each 80 x 80

Fig. 89 and 90

from *River* series, 1998

Inkjet prints on canvas

each 80 x 80

Fig.91

Pavement series, 1998

Inkjet prints on canvas

each 80 x 80

Fig.92

Reflection I, 1998

Inkjet prints on canvas

24 panels, each 58 x 58

Fig.93

Reflection I, 1998 (detail)

Fig.94

Reflection II, 1999

Injet prints on canvas

50 panels, each 54 x 70

Fig.95

Reflection II, 1999 (detail)

Fig.96

Reflection III, 1999

Injet prints on canvas

21 panels, each 58 x 58

Fig.97

Reflection III, 1999 (detail)

Fig.98-101

from *Breach* series, 1999

Inkjet prints on canvas

78 x 226

* Fig.98-101

from *Breach* series, 1999

Fig.102

Location III, 2000 (Installation)

Inkjet prints on canvas

160 panels, each 25 x 35

240 x 1000

Fig.103

Location III, 2000 (detail)

Fig.104

Location III, 2000 (detail)

Fig.105 -130

from Hood series, 2000

each panel, 83 x 90

Fig. 131

Bonnet I, 2000

Inkjet prints on canvas

9 panels, each 58 x 58

200 x 200 (Installation)

Fig. 131

Bonnet I, 2000 (detail)

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